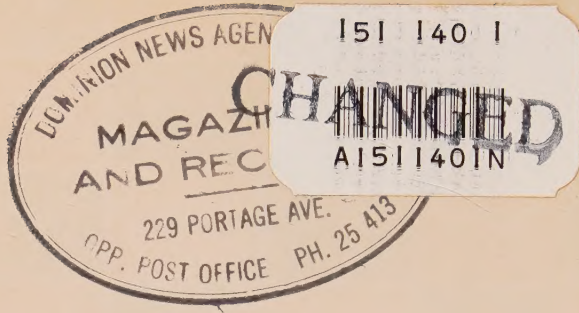






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THE MIRACLE BOY

BOOKS BY LOUIS GOLDING

FICTION


FORWARD FROM BABYLON
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA
DAY OF ATONEMENT
THE MIRACLE BOY
STORE OF LADIES

VERSE

SORROWS OF WAR
SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME
PROPHET AND FOOL

BELLES LETTRES

SUNWARD
SICILIAN NOON



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THE MIRACLE BOY

By *Louis Golding*

*with interpretations
in black and white*

By *Herbert Gurschner*



New York

ALFRED · A · KNOPF

1927

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To
ELLA
PRINZESSIN VON CHERVADSKY
Our Collaborator
We Dedicate
This Book

THE MIRACLE BOY

FOREWORD

I

IT was the black raven on the shoulder of the yellow-haired youth that first distracted me from the pre-occupation I had brought into the Floriansthal. Yet for the moment it seemed that the raven might consolidate in some odd manner the wisps of theory that wound loosely across my brain.

For I may take it that the raven is no Christian bird. It is a dark alien creature, aboriginal, not so much hostile to the meek dove as bleakly unaware of it. It is a bird of divinations and soothsayings — a bird of Etruria rather than of Bethlehem. Certainly when I first set eyes on Hugo's raven at the head of the gorge of the Floriansthal, painted with no mean skill on a white wall that bore also an image of Florian with his lance, his cruse of water and the house burning by his knees — certainly my memory could furnish me with no saint whose symbol was a raven. Nor have I learnt since of any saint attended by such a symbol in any sequestered region of Catholic Europe.

It is possible that somewhere upon a bleak Castilian plateau or in a forgotten heathland of Roumania, a raven, having acquired other than the familiar associations, has been accepted as some local saint's familiar even by the priests. But it so happened that I was aware that in Tirol not merely is a raven a thing of ill omen, foreboding imminent death in your household should it settle a moment

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on the window-sill, but a black cat crossing your path is ominous too, though elsewhere an augur of good fortune.

Yet as I tramped the difficult track that morning along the Floriansthal — the valley, you observe, quite definitely of St. Florian — I saw again and still again a representation of the yellow-haired youth and the black raven on his shoulder. Not by any means all the houses I saw were so decorated, but in one instance bird and youth took flight into a third dimension. I mean that both were rendered in a piece of painted wooden sculpture about three or four feet high. The carver was a peasant, evidently, perhaps the peasant to whom the very house belonged where I had halted. The Floriansthal is neither well-known nor beloved among the Tirolese themselves and few strangers penetrate there. It excites no baritone balladry like the Zillertal nor are its gloomy mountains tenderly constituted by the erection of so many tourist-huts into a four days' diversion of sweat and beer for stock-brokers from Berlin, formidable with chamois-beards and alpenstocks. The Floriansthal is neither well-known nor beloved, I say; you will learn very little more than that few of its inhabitants cannot carve a crucifix, with Christ and all his wounds complete, in three hours, and that none cannot swill his half-litre of wine in a gulp.

It was probable, therefore, that the peasant who owned that house had himself carved the youth and raven, and himself painted them, both operations being performed with a brutal swiftness and vigour. But the brutality was in the execution only. There was a sort of fierce reverence in the spirit underlying the execution. Again the contrast of the black wings and yellow hair held my eyes; and examining the image closer than I had till now been able to, I perceived just how blue the eyes were; so blue indeed,

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that they almost ceased to be blue — they were pale and bleached and almost terrible as the sky sometimes is in these valleys, when the hot wind surges in from the south. There was no doubt of the wild blueness of the youth's eyes. The peasant had seen to it. All his art had concentrated itself upon them.

And it was his evident desire that the young man and his dark attendant should never be absent from his own eyes, or his wife's, or his children's. The figure crowned the upright post of the well not a few yards distant from his front door; whenever he looked out from his window through the branches of the apricot trained against the house-front — before he saw the mountain beyond or the clouds between, he saw the yellow hair and the black raven and the bleached blue eyes.

I had not entered the valley of Florian without expecting to be confronted with mystery — but it was a mystery not so immediate and mortal as this. I had merely to inquire, I thought, from any peasant who the youth was and what was the meaning of his raven. Definitely it was an immortal mystery I had come to investigate. Let me not say investigate, for to solve these problems not the erudition of a Niebuhr or a Müller had sufficed, and they remain unsolved. My intention was no more than humbly to put myself in accord with the mood of the mystery. Perhaps to me in the chance turning of a plough in the backward fields of Midrans, in the grave-side babbling of some ancient crone, some hint would be presented, which, fearfully conveyed to the scholars of Heidelberg or Oxford, might throw a ray of light upon this abyss of Etrurian speculation.

I had for some time been obsessed by the mystery of the complete death of Etruria, and had read whatever came to

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my hand in the libraries of Florence and Naples regarding its inscrutable origins and undecipherable language. The theory which Müller first ventured that the key lay assuredly in the defiles of Tirol had fastened upon me powerfully; and when so far away as Sbeitla in Tunisia a hump-backed Innsbruck scholar poking about like myself in the Roman ruins there, told me of the Floriansthal and the bronze figures found in Midrans and the dialect spoken by the older people, I determined I had had enough of the barren water-courses and the desert winds. I should make my way towards those valleys pregnant with mystery and thunderous with water. Water, above all, water! A nostalgia for water was upon me in the heart of that barren land, for exuberant and prodigal water.

Indeed, the hump-backed scholar did not speak to me directly of the Floriansthal. At least three days elapsed before he permitted himself to trace his astounding thread between a primitive bronze figure disinterred from the high pastures of a Tirolese valley and those late but admirable Roman temples at Sbeitla on the edge of the African desert. It was as if he was loth to uncover his jealous secret; but when once I had won his confidence, he chattered with an almost youthful enthusiasm and garrulity; until when I avowed my intention of leaving Sbeitla for Midrans forthwith, once more he withdrew into himself, and eyed me remotely.

I will not expatiate on his particular obsession, though it is true that distinguished scholars have maintained it. He connected Sbeitla with Midrans precisely in this manner; the Etrurians were admittedly the schoolmasters of Rome in her faith, her arts, and especially her sciences. The Etrurians, he contended, were a people who descended upon Italy from the country now known as Tirol. Though

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Etruria was dead — excepting in the names of certain villages and on the lips of a few greybeards and beldames, Etruria was immortal wherever Rome had extended her derived splendour. The older artificers of Midrans in the Floriansthal, they who preceded the carvers of Christs, persisted in these artificers who erected the gateways and columns of Sbeitla on the fringe of the Roman empery in Africa. . . .

You see how magnificently Germanic a conception this is, not unrelated in its general spirit with those ethnological expositions which prove Jesus and Shakespeare to have been Teutons. Excepting, as I say, that certain eminent scholars have inclined to his theory and certain facts remain which no other theory goes an inch towards accounting for.

To-morrow, I said, I make my way towards Kairouan and Tunis. Half a week later, in Tirol, I shall have those inexplicable noises in my ear, those strange place-names, Velthurns, Gufidaun, Sistrans, mouthed ignorantly and gutturally by the peasants who inhabit them. Thence I shall proceed to that darkest of their valleys, and in Etrurian Midrans, await what might happen.

The hump-backed scholar warned me, lifting his hand to his nose. He was an authority, he said, on the most opaque dialects of his country, but he doubted if he had years enough left to resolve the secrets presented to him by the tongue of Midrans. Moreover only a handful of toothless old men and women spoke it now, and no more than a few words of it. What hope had I a foreigner . . . I had no hope, I said, of any success at all where he had failed. I merely wanted to fill my nostrils with the scent of water and of the mysteries he hinted at. He said they were not kindly people. The bronze figures and certain pieces

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of amber and the bronze rings which had been disinterred lately, had disappeared into a darkness almost as profound as that from which they had emerged. Certain scholarly and commercial gentlemen from Vienna had groaned their way into the valley and had returned as rich, and as poor, as they had come. I would take my chance, I said.

He said they were not merely surly people; that when they drank too much, if it was possible for a Floriansthaler to drink too much, they had an ancestral habit of gouging out your two eyes with their thumbs if they deemed you smiled upon their maidens. I shall not smile upon their maidens, I said, excepting politely.

What of the other villages in the country, he said, which also were named by the Etruscans — there were Sistrans and Firmisaun and Amras and Altrans and Velthurns, cheek by jowl with names so palpably German as Rattenberg and Jenbach. Why should I not betake myself to those healthier places? He may have been deliberately, and not too cunningly, urging me to betake myself to no other place than Midrans in Florian's valley. If it was his intention, he succeeded, as you see. It certainly was mine.

That was how I came to make the acquaintance of the black raven on the shoulders of the yellow-haired youth. As I stood by the well of the peasant's house where the bird and his master were carved in wood, it seemed certain that in a few moments, if I desired it, I should resolve this initial mystery with which the Floriansthal had confronted me.

The youth was a saint evidently, though in a moment the association of ideas or images of which the word "saint" is composed — as, for instance, man, symbol, halo — presented the eye of my brain with the picture of

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this particular saint, the youth with the raven, quite persistently dissociated from his halo.

This was curious but not shocking. It might be the custom of this particular valley to stress rather the humanity than the beatitude of its saints. No, this was not true. I at once recalled Anthony, Florian, Sebastian, Joseph — they had not lacked their haloes.

And then also another fact, more startling, thrust itself at me. The youth was presented invariably in modern clothing — not in any urban modern, but precisely in the week-day clothing of the peasants in these valleys. I ought to have noticed the fact earlier, I assured myself. For the painters took every opportunity of emphasising the fancy costume, as it were, of the more familiar saints. The helmet and cuirass and greaves of Florian left no doubt he was a perfect Roman gentleman. The costume of Christopher was clearly in the Canaanitish mode. The youth with the yellow hair might have been one of these same peasants whom I saw from time to time, felling trees on the slopes or taking the small odorous cows to pasture. Whereon I further realized that the paint was hardly dry on the wooden figure before me, and that none of his images painted in fresco could be more than a few years old.

At this moment the door of the house opened and a small girl came tripping out towards the well with a pail over her arm. Her hair was neatly screwed up in three small plaits, but the cut of her check bodice and skirt gave her an appearance of womanly efficiency.

“God greet!” I called out to her affably.

She caught sight of me and stopped. She pursed her tiny lips a trifle surlily and then allowed an answering “God greet!” to escape them. It was a little disturbing to

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find even a minute maiden in plaits so early corroborating the account given me of the Floriansthal by the hump-backed scholar. She still stood motionless with the pail over her arm.

“Fine day!” I said.

“No!”

That seemed explicit. Yet there was no doubt of it. It was a fine day. I thought it advisable to temporize.

“Yes, later,” I hazarded, “it will rain!”

“No!”

I was determined to drive the blonde mite out of her path of arid negation. I thought hard for a moment, beaming at my friendliest. She did not seem thawed.

“You are going to fetch some water from the well?”

“No!”

“Of course not!” I said ironically. That seemed to disturb her a little. Then she pursed her lips more formidably. I felt I was not getting anywhere. Oh yes, I remembered, I had a charm for small maidens. I took a large tablet of chocolate out of my pocket, bit off a lump, and devoured it appreciatively. I saw a light of cupidity enter the grey eyes.

“Thou likest?” I asked.

She did not say Yes, but at least she did not say No this time. She moved the handle of the pail from one arm to the other.

I approached and held out a lump and offered it to her. She accepted it with a stiff curtsey, then proceeded to suck it where she stood.

I determined to recapitulate.

“Fine day!” I said.

“Yes!”

I flushed with triumph.

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"Thou likest chocolate, yes?"

"Yes!"

"How art thou called?"

"Maridl!"

"Ah, Maridl! A pleasing name! Tell me, Maridl ——"

She looked up at me sharply.

"The saint, there, on the post. What is his name? Who is he?"

Before I had finished speaking I saw her three pale plaits rise towards me as she turned and fled into the house. I heard her voice, but could not make out what she said. No voice replied. I merely saw a huge naked arm reach out in the twilight of the house and pull the front door to. I made my way ruminatively along the valley towards Midrans.

It was at this time or not much later that the fantastic likeness presented itself to me between this boy saint of the Christians and the boy saint of their prehistoric ancestors, the Etrurians, who had most assuredly lived in this valley, whether they migrated here from Italy or whether these secret mountains had engendered them and they had thence migrated southward. I must confess that by now my mind was peculiarly alert for analogies however tenuous, for any whisper capable, with or without violence, of such an interpretation as I sought to put on it.

Here, I said, is no doubt at all of a boy saint among these Christian dwellers in the Florianthal, whatever the reason be that they do not honour him with a halo. But that they honour him is manifest, throughout the length of this valley; and I do not doubt that I shall find Midrans the chief altar of his cult. It is with a raven, rather than with a halo, they seek to honour him, these strange Christians. And yet, as the scholar told me in Sbeitla, they

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preserve certain practices which I should doubt the bishop of this country approves of: as for instance the bathing of the male child in a basin of strong wine when he is a month old. Christian, do you say? If this is no ceremonial devotion to the Etrurian God, Phuphluns, by the Romans known as Bacchus, what sort of ceremony is it?

And the boy saint. The boy saint, I repeat. Remember Tages, the boy saint of the Etrurians. Cicero, in his book on Divinations, tells the story; how a peasant was ploughing his land. And once, the plough thrusting deeper than usual a Miracle Boy sprang from the ground. He it was who composed, later, the Sacred Books of his race. But then, in the moment that he arose from the fecund earth, his yellow hair was a beacon. All Etruria thought, as they stood about him, marvelling, startled from their ploughing and spinning by the sudden blaze of his hair, that it was from the sky's womb rather than the earth's he had issued, so blue his eyes were.

(No, no. I paused. I am transferring to Tages the yellow hair and the blue eyes of the boy saint of the Floriansthal. There is no record among the ancients that Tages had blue eyes and yellow hair. No, he had hoary hair, though he was but a lad. He was full of all wisdom. I must try to keep the two boys distinct.)

And thereon Tages stood up in the midst of his people and taught them the secrets of divination, how to interpret the entrails of beasts and the flight of birds.

Birds. . . . The raven of the yellow-haired youth of the Floriansthal. . . .

I stood on the path by a fountain of bright water that had polished the boulders out of which it arose into smooth globes. Dewy ferns glistened in the spray. I burst out laughing at the comical hollowness of my fantasies. I was

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behaving like a real scholar, rather than a man of average common sense, like a palæontologist, a conchologist, any of those insane fantasiacs who convert a donkey's jaw-bone into some stranger monster than any mere brontosaurus, or a patch of grass burned by a boy-scout's fire into the site of a Druidic temple.

I forced myself, I confess it, to that peal of laughter. I laughed at myself again and again, but each time the laughter died in my throat. A mystic certainty was upon me, unrelated with tenuous similitudes; something shaken down from the bearded branches of the larch-trees and impressed by the roaring or whispering water on the slopes of my brain. And there would be a time, I told myself, unnumbered generations hence, when no scholar would disentangle Tages, the wise boy of the Etrurians, son of Hercules, grandson of Jupiter, from Hugo of Midrans, the youth of the yellow hair, third son of Franz Harpf, that roaring drunkard, that grim wife-beater, painter of saints in fresco and carver of Christs in cherry-wood.

It was another thought than this that quelled my laughter by the fountain under the maidenhair-fern. Three peasants came into sight from behind a thicket of hazel. They heard my laughter and themselves smiled. No one else till then had smiled at me in the Floriansthal. And I attribute to that peal of what evidently seemed to them half-witted laughter, the kindness with which the peasants of Midrans treated me, which was such as no stranger receives and few men of their own race from other valleys. I should not else have been allowed to learn so much of Hugo's story, though they were never garrulous; and despite their good will, I never forgot how necessary it was to tread warily, as the little maiden with the blond plaits

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had taught me even so soon. They treated me kindly, I say, because they were certain that no one, to put it bluntly, but a half-wit, stops by a fountain and shrieks with laughter into the morning. They had themselves no mean allowance of Trottels in Midrans, whom we speak of as zanies, or village idiots. But they did not resent an addition to their number, for whilst they treat their Trottels with a sort of reverence, at the same time they extract most of their amusement out of them. They were generous enough to admit that in some respects I behaved almost as rationally as themselves. It was only when they saw me buried for so many hours and so many days with ink and pen and paper — busy, in fact, with these chronicles — that their most optimistic suspicions regarding my sanity returned to them. What sane man would keep a bottle of ink before him three-quarters of the day, when it might be a bottle of wine, and a second bottle and a third bottle? No sane man, said they, as they strode into the inn of the White Lamb and lurched out under dipping stars.

It occurred to me more than once to wonder if some Wirt of the White Lamb, some portly host dead and gone generations ago, had named his inn with a deliberate malice after the gentlest of creatures. For no tutelary creature could have presided less appropriately over the swillings and knifings and eye-gougings that took place under its auspices. But there were moments before dawn sometimes, when the phantasmal flappings of a heavy bird's wings roused me from sleep, and moments in the aboriginal twilight of the fir-woods above Midrans when I felt an unreal claw fasten upon my shoulder. And these were the moments when I was certain that the White Lamb of Midrans was an ancient creature even before that inn was built, several hundreds of years ago; that it was old even

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when the soothsayer of Galilee appointed it to be his symbol. Even the ancient priests of Etruria, ministers to a creed that lacked Christ's gentleness and Apollo's beauty, had sacrificed him with occult and frightful ceremonies on the altars of Tages, the Miracle Boy, the boy with yellow hair and stone-blue eyes and a raven that croaked and cawed over the steaming carcase.

But as I passed into the threshold of the inn some hours after noonday, it was a mild enough creature that swung over my head, suspended from a stanchion of superb wrought-iron, very gaily painted. There is no craft in which the Floriansthalers are not at least the equals of any dalesmen in Tirol; and though I was hungry and my nailed boots seemed all of lead by the time I arrived at the White Lamb, I could not forbear from marvelling, in the very odour of dumpling-soup and fried meat that came surging towards me from the kitchen of the White Lamb, past the enormous crucifix that hung over the cobbled passage — I could not forbear from marvelling at the skill which had twisted that sullen metal so airily. From the vertical bar by which the whole sign was clamped to the wall, a whole meadow of grass and bright flowers slanted towards the lamb's feet as if a summer wind had bent them. The white lamb danced among the tops of wheat and harebells and pansies and sunflowers and anemones — for the artist had paid no attention to the size in nature of his flowers or their distinct seasons of growth. Any flower at any season would have danced out of its seed to meet the tips of the feet of so lovely a lamb.

I did well to pause a moment under the lamb and his pansies. I was not destined to meet much more of gentleness in Midrans, for a shadow lay upon it, the place was uneasy with dark contentions. They did not at that moment

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distract me from the savour of Frau Prandl's dumpling-soup which she herself invariably took in hand, despite all her majesty and all the gold tassels on her festival hats and all her choice of brocades to wear in the procession of Corpus Christi. I have never eaten such Knödeln, such dumplings, as Frau Prandl brought into being in the kitchen of the White Lamb. They were so fragile, indeed, that you imagined that no process grosser than incantation could have condensed them out of the spicy air. And yet they were of so carnal a substance, that though her small son might devour twelve at a sitting (and each seemed as large as his close-cropped head) I felt, if I ate four, that I should never touch food again till I left the Floriansthal.

I did not disturb the sacrament of the dumplings by inquiring from her, as I had so vainly inquired from Maridl, what was the meaning of that recent painting on her house-front — the painting of a youth with a raven on his shoulder. The stretching forth of that naked and massive arm across the twilight of Maridl's house to shut the door upon my question, had affected me powerfully. I flattered myself that I was not so strange to the behaviour of peasants in sequestered places that I could not construct out of that single gesture the necessity for the complete pantomime of discretion. Here was mystery. I was not fool enough to shut myself for ever from its solution by banging at its doors. Oh yes, its operations were patent enough in frescoes twelve feet tall, but that would not prevent the valley from fabricating with sly and instinctive unanimity some entirely false explanation to hoodwink the stranger. I applauded myself for the care with which, earlier on, I had refrained from leading the conversation in the direction of the yellow-haired youth, when the group of peasants halted by the maidenhair fountain and passed the

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time of day. Nor did I seek to take advantage here in the White Lamb of the landlady's regal condescension in presiding over my dinner. Not that she demeaned herself by setting down a dish before me with her own hand. No, she hovered aloof and voluminously, and whilst now my dumplings, now my Schnitzel, now my scrambled pancake, presented themselves; "*Schmeckt's?*" she inquired, "It tastes?" — much as if a queen might desire to know if the garters and stars she has conferred are agreeable to their recipients.

I sought no occasion to extract from her the knowledge I was pursuing, though I must lay no claim to a diabolic discretion with respect to Frau Prandl. A stranger from Asia would have considered it just as presumptuous to try and pump the Pythian priestess in Delphi. Before the end of the evening the various notabilities of the village had dropped in to the Herrenzimmer of the White Lamb — the Bar Parlour, as it were — from the Burgermeister's self, to the priest, the schoolmaster, and Wildhauer the miller, who was the richest peasant in Midrans after the Burgermeister and my host, Herr Prandl. Once or twice I contemplated putting in some word which might conceivably bring up the subject; for even so soon it had completely taken possession of me. But on each occasion I found that my tongue simply would not work. This was due partly to my sense (to be confirmed, as time proceeded, more amply than I could have anticipated in moments of the most outrageous speculation) — to my sense that I was on the threshold of some monumental mystery. It was due also to the fear which these gentlemen inspired in me. Each of them could have cracked my skull between his palms, excepting the schoolmaster, with his red hair and watery eyes, whose timidity and nervousness only threw their

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contours into more jagged relief. They were elemental creatures, scarred as the rocks which hung over their pastures. I made my way into the Bauernstube, the room of the peasants, who were less remote and oracular than the worthies I had left in the room beyond the passage. They drank deep and continuously, they laughed and roared, but their laughter inspired less confidence in me than their roaring. I wondered if I might perhaps hear one of them, well on his way to complete prostration, let fall a single word pertinent to the youth. He evidently occupied a significant place in their cosmology, and whether they themselves painted and carved him, or whether they commissioned the work, it was quite lately that they had taken pains to have him so substantially before their eyes. But neither zany nor drunkard let fall a single word concerning him. It was as if he belonged to some area of terror or wonder upon which no foot stumbled, however crazily it wandered elsewhere.

Several days passed and I began to wonder whether, just because the answer to all my inquiries lay so bafflingly close at hand, they must always remain unanswered. Sunday intervened, and the services gave me no hint at all, though I had hardly hoped they would. It was after Benediction that I first spoke a few words with the priest, who was courteous, though hardly less a peasant than his congregation. He was blind, it seemed, in his left eye, which was covered by a black shade. It might have struck a note of grotesque among the vestments of a priest less splendid than he was during the officiation. But when he had put his vestments aside, I discovered him to be not more intimidating than anyone else in Midrans. He had no compunction at all in coming into the Herrenzimmer at the

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White Lamb, Sunday though it was, and sharing a litre of wine with me. Next day he returned the courtesy, and our good terms were confirmed by the discovery of our mutual interest in *ex libris* book-plates, of which he had a fine collection, destined at his death for the library of the cloister at Schlamms, six or seven hours' journey away, in that wider valley of Schammsthal into which the valley of Florian debouches. On the discovery that I possessed a duplicate of a Dürer *ex libris* which he especially coveted, and which he arranged to exchange, with all the enthusiasm of a schoolboy, for three or four less valuable duplicates which he himself possessed — he ordered his house-keeper not merely to lay before us another litre of wine, but to make Glühwein of it, that is to say to set it before us, spiced with cloves, cinnamon and lemon-peel, sweetened with sugar, and all boiling hot. There are few nobler beverages in this sad world.

It will be seen how easily I fell into my mistake (not that very night of the mulled wine, but two nights after. The mulled wine might have made my mistake more pardonable. And yet, on the other hand, how could I in the least divine it was a mistake at all? Surely the youth with the yellow hair was the priest's province, if any man's in the Floriansthal? Who else might account more satisfactorily for the vis-à-vis of Christopher, the rival of Florian?)

So that I put the question to him, amiably and sleepily, in the room of his books, and small harmonium, and *ex libris*, and devotional decorations, the front room of the priest-house that stood on the spiny hill facing my own window. Casually I told him how that frequent repetition of the youth and the raven on the house-fronts of the

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Floriansthal interested me. Would he perhaps tell me what it meant?

Of a sudden I saw him towering over me, shutting out the light and the room, all Midrans, the whole Floriansthal. His colossal hands hung over me like some savage ape's. For a minute he could not find words to express his anger. Then at last he managed to fling out through his teeth:

"How dare you? O unashamed! Unashamed!"

He dropped his hands to his side and his huge body fell into a woeful shaking. "Go!" he said, "Get out! Yes, yes, you are a stranger! Forgive! Leave it so! Get out!"

I did not sleep that night, as will be readily believed. But not only I was sleepless. In my wretched ignorance I had brought upon the priest some such monstrous distress that he too was awake till an hour or two before morning. At least it was then that he put out his lamp. All the rest of the night I saw him pacing forward and backward along the balcony in front of his window, extinguishing it every twenty seconds or so with the bulk of his body. More than once he shook his fists blindly into the sky. Often that enormous man seemed to be biting his finger-nails or knuckles like a schoolgirl in hysteria.

No, the scholars who confronted themselves with the black language of Etruria were not faced with a more direful mystery than I, here in the village of Midrans under the thick forests.

2

Though at length I managed to apprehend the complete drama of the Miracle Boy, I doubt if I permitted myself to ask a single question, either from its protagonists, of whom many were still alive, or from the spectators. Cer-

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tain of the actors were dead, also to be numbered among the protagonists. But this narrative will attempt to indicate in due season that these others were never really alive, in any sense hitherto familiar to ordinary men. To speak also of spectators in a village which numbered not more than several hundred inhabitants must also be incorrect. Not an infant in arms but must have been an actor in the Miracle Boy's drama. A new-born infant, born dead, will in fact be numbered among the more intensive group of the protagonists, when Hugo Harpf's tale approaches its climax. It must be explained that the community of Midrans included also rather less than a hundred extra-territorial subjects, those families of mountain peasants stuck almost inaccessibly away in wild gorges close to the rim of that glacier at the head of the Floriansthal from which the steely waters of the Sturmbach issue, hurtling. It is the peculiar and unprecedented quality of the Miracle Boy's story that certain of its actors enter into it because of their dying, rather than merely because they lived. And of none was this truer than of Franz Holzhammer, as his throat dripped on the crude stone-paving of his cloud-hung hovel, and the ecstasy drummed and dwindled away, and the glaze quenched his eyes.

I say that I asked no question from man or woman in Midrans. My experiences with the little girl not far from the valley's mouth, and with the priest at its head, filled me with an almost superstitious dread of blunt questioning. On the other hand I was more determined to stay on in Midrans, whatever happened, than ever had seemed likely on my way to the Floriansthal from the Roman ruins in Sbeitla; though it will be understood I had not made so long a journey without a very lively interest in Midrans. My interest now was no longer mainly academic. It was

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not an interest. It was a passion. I knew I could not leave Midrans till I precisely interpreted the silent croak of the raven on the shoulders of the youth with yellow hair.

I repeat. I asked no questions. I apprehended in slow stages all I sought to know. The sighing of the pines, the roaring of the Sturmbach, the crack of thunder on the peaks — from these I extracted certain disjoint syllables, without meaning in themselves, but, juxtaposed with other sounds, juxtaposed with scents and glimpses, with chance expressions upon faces — all these at length laboriously cohered into this tale. Not only noises of terror and awe conspired to possess my brain with the meaning it sought; but workaday noises also, of carts creaking and scythes moaning and hatchets striking and high cuckoos calling, crickets chirping, milk tinkling into cans, broth simmering upon charcoal fires. Nor would I by any means maintain that it was only through such blind instruction that I learned the complex drama I here expound. I overheard chance words not intended for me. I interpreted aright certain dubious hints intended to mislead me, or to remain meaningless to me, though other persons might understand their meaning. More than once (for the habit grew upon me of ready silence) people spoke as if no stranger were present in their midst at all. I closed my eyes, for it was impossible that my open eyes should not betray their tremulous excitement. And in a moment I might become aware of a sudden awkward suspension of the conversation and its not very skilful diversion into another channel.

And yet there came a time during my sojourn in Midrans — I certainly cannot say in what exact day or week — when people referred to the whole tale of Hugo and his raven as if I were not there, or, more comfortingly, as if I were no stranger. It is, I think, a fact of some interest, that

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their overt discussion of the theme presented me with no significant development of the drama which I had not already apprehended; interesting, I mean, because it stresses the elemental nature of the whole mystery. Which indicates that a fairly sensitive mind needed no more than to put itself into accord with those elements out of which the tragic flower arose, in order to divine the nature of the whole growth, from root to blossom. Many specific details, of course, I only became aware of during the late stage. But I had no occasion at all to recast in substance the chronicles here presented, which already had proceeded a long way towards completion. Being prevented from actually discussing Hugo, or his raven, or his sweetheart, or his enemy, with any living person, I had recourse at once to the stack of empty paper which I had intended to darken with an entirely different narrative. And I perceived at once that if I permitted myself to philosophise upon the facts I successively divined and arranged, I should arrive nowhere at all. I should beat my hands vainly in a fog of speculation regarding such themes as wonder-working, crowd hypnotism, telepathy, catalepsy, and I know not what else. Æsthetically there was one course only open for me: to expound the facts in the astonishing history of the Miracle Boy as they occurred. Let me hasten to correct myself. I will not say as they occurred, but as half a thousand people in this remote valley in Tirol are convinced they occurred. Nor are any of them — not those with some pretence to culture, nor those who implacably abominate his memory — any the less convinced of the miracles of Hugo Harpf than of the miracles of Saint Teresa or Saint George. They differ only in this, that some people believe he died like Faust, and some that he died like Jesus Christ, being either an agent of Satan or a younger son of God.

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This debate concerns me only in a secondary degree. What teleological conclusions I have formed are my own affair. I do no more than present the tale of the youth whose hair was like the morning and of the midnight raven upon his shoulder.

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CHAPTER ONE

HANS and Hugo are the names of the chief actors in this tale. I find no difficulty in conceiving them as two separate names for a single creature, obverse and reverse, each partaking of the same substance and the same spirit. That is, doubtless, because I have the course of their history and its climax in my mind. Let them quite clearly begin as boy and raven, raven and boy. They will end early enough and sadly enough. It is true that the death of Hans the raven followed by some days the death of Hugo. Yet the essential death of the raven must have taken place at the moment of the tragic extinction of his master. Thereafter, they were both dead together, Hans being more dead during those few days of his cadaverous isolation than after the sergeant's bullet shattered the small devoted head and extinguished the fires of those blue-grey eyes; those eyes which, more than ever before, seemed during the few days in the sepulchre to be burning with lights enkindled neither upon the comfortable earth nor in the goodly heavens. For the bird must have seemed during that time the active principle of Death, guarding his own in the sepulchre, with a beak like a sword and claws like lances. Thereafter, when the sable wings suspended their convulsive flutterings, the thing the priest and his men trod so savagely into the earth, seemed certainly not worth the outlay of any effort. So vain a bundle of flesh and feathers it was, it seemed not even to be dead, for it was hard to think so wretched a thing had been once alive.

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Any tussock of grass or heap of dead leaves was as worthy of such vindictiveness. Hans and Hugo were at last sundered from each other.

Excepting indeed, as I have said, in the hearts of those crude men and women, who placed him, being not of the priest's party, over their fountains and upon their walls in wooden and painted effigy. As they did not hold them sundered in their death, so they sought to bring them together at their birth; at the birth, rather, of the boy, Hugo. For many were of the opinion that the bird was half a century old, or a whole century. They said even, that at no time had Hans been a fledgeling in a bulky nest high-hung on a crag or stuffed into some pine-tree's obscure summit; that he had at no time issued from some blue-green egg, blue as sky and green as grass, and marked with brown markings like ploughed earth. They said that he had issued from the conjuncture of smokier elements — said both the priest's men and Hugo's men. Moreover (they insisted), upon that morning when Hugo's mother had come in from digging the potato-patch in order to give birth to her husband's third son, the raven came to rest upon the window-sill and looked in upon the event, croaking and striking the window with his beak; and not many minutes later, when Hugo had first given tongue in this place of men, the raven answered him from his perch behind the mother's head, though how he had entered could not be explained, for the window and door were shut, and there was no chimney-place in that room, or in any in Midrans.

I do not believe this story of the first meeting between Hans and Hugo; nor because of its unlikeliness, for I must confess I am disposed to accept the truth of a number of incidents which seem, however regarded, considerably

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more contrary to reason. I do not believe it because the story belongs, as it were, to an apocrypha. Even so soon after the death of Hugo as my appearance in Midrans, quite few years after, a certain amount of legend had grown up round the central events and characters. By the time he has read not many more of these pages, the reader might protest with some heat that the whole business, after all, is nothing but legend. I will for the moment accept the description. But let me make this plain at least, that the legend exists along two levels: a canonical and an apocryphal. I know that the application of those terms to a series of events described as legend begs a theological question. The thought does not perturb me if I convey a clear meaning. I wish to suggest that the canonical legend of Hugo relates to events which to the dwellers in Midrans and the Floriansthal generally were as historical as the events in the Great War. I might say that the tale of Hugo was considerably more historical to them than the Great War. They had to refer to those incidents narrated by the good Bishop Jacobus de Voragine in the *Aurea Legenda*, or to the miracles described by the Apostles, before they felt themselves in contact with so sure a history. Not that they themselves had read anything of Jacobus or much of Matthew. I doubt if even the priest's researches into either were extensive, at least since the days of his training in the seminary at Brixen. But they accepted in faith the events recorded by the Bishop and the Apostle. The history of Hugo they witnessed with their own eyes. I speak, therefore, of the events which they all witnessed (or all so firmly believed they had witnessed) as the canonical legend of Hugo. The apocryphal legend consists of certain events which some believed and some did not believe; events which were probably invented, however undeliberately, by

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his more ardent supporters or enemies. I shall almost entirely devote myself in these pages to the exposition of the canonical legend, for only so will I condense the tale of Hugo into a manageable volume. Simple as the peasants of the Floriansthal are in their main outlines, their piety, their avarice, their lewdness, there are none the less dark places in their minds where strange fantasies suspend, like bats in a cavern where no light enters. I will not liberate these uncanny creatures. It will be enough that of winged beasts the single raven flaps and croaks over these pages.

There is a further reason for rejecting the story of this supernatural first appearance of Hans, the raven. It introduces a foreign element into the whole conception of the bird and his relation to his master's story. It is a fact of particular importance that, throughout, the raven is precisely nothing but a raven; an extraordinary raven, of course, but nothing more. There is nothing beyond the normal in Hans's behaviour than his fidelity — a quality rarer perhaps in a superior order of bipeds. Nor is there anything beyond the normal to report in the behaviour of the yellow-haired Hugo, for the first seventeen years of his life. I present to you in the first section of these pages an ordinary little boy and an ordinary raven, his devoted friend. There were times, it is true, when Hugo ate more than other little boys. But there are no times in the history of any little boy when he does not eat more than other little boys. As a small child Hugo was always whittling away at chips of pine-wood or, when he got the chance, at chips of cherry or pear. He dabbled with paints, as his father had done, and his father's father. I have in my possession a rendering on glass of Christ staggering under his Cross, the paint being put on from behind skilfully. This was done before Hugo was thirteen years old, and was one

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of the little achievements which later in the boy's career were to attract the attention of the gallant captain, Oskar Tachezy, who had penetrated into the Floriansthal to rest his shattered nerves after a protracted encounter with the Italians on the summits of the South Tirolese front. But these achievements of Hugo did not immediately attract the attention of the captain. A score of boys of Hugo's age had produced in their spare hours work no less meritorious, as casually as they herded goats or stacked hay or dragged pine-logs down the hills. Elsewhere than in the Floriansthal Hugo's performances might have been noteworthy. In the Floriansthal they were not, excepting to the Hauptmann Tachezy. But it was the resemblance of Hugo to their lately deceased son which first drew the Frau Hauptmann's attention and then her husband's. The Frau Hauptmann wore a lock of the dead boy's hair on her breast. It was pale yellow hair like Hugo's. Hair of that tint is not too common in the shrouded valley of the Floriansthal, where the Germanic stock has not penetrated deeply; and I picture the Frau Hauptmann suddenly seeing the sunlight glint on Hugo's head where he stood perched on a ladder against an outhouse of the White Lamb and dropping a word over his shoulder to one of the lads sauntering by—I picture her, I say, throwing herself upon the chest of her husband and crying "Oskar! Oskar!" till the poor man wondered if the Col di Lana might not be more reposeful to his nerves.

It was the glinting of his yellow hair that attracted the attention of Frau Tachezy. It seems probable, in view of the raven's subsequent history, that precisely the same circumstance had attracted the swift eyes of Hans nearly a dozen years earlier. Despite the various discomforts in which his passion involved him, Hans was never taught to

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overcome his appetite for gold and silver or anything that glittered, from Hugo's yellow hair to the gold tassels on Hugo's mother's hat. It was not that Hans made any confusion between those substances which glittered, a delight to the eye, and those more sombre substances which delighted the stomach. These he ate, the others he buried. Hans, it must be stated, was an incorrigible thief. Which brings me back to the point from which I started. Hugo was an ordinary little boy who sometimes ate too much. Hans was an ordinary raven who suffered, like all domesticated ravens, from kleptomania.

Of all things that glittered it was Hugo's hair only that he sought neither to worry nor to steal. Hugo's hair was the sun that illumined the else obscure vaults of his spirit. When did this sun first dawn on him? As I have said, I refuse to accept the story that refers that fateful moment to Hugo's first appearance in the homestead of his ancestors. No self-respecting raven would have been interested in the pale amorphous fluff that lay on the scalp of Hugo Harpf aged five minutes. The child was, in fact, six years old at least when his mysterious friend descended upon him out of the thick wood. He had been wandering for half an hour with little Peppi Ganner along the edges of the wood that sweeps closely down upon the houses of Midrans from the north-westerly slopes. The silence of the wood and their distance from their mothers suddenly became terrible to the two small boys. Every thought of the wild strawberries they had been looking for left their heads. Each sought the chubby and sticky hand of his companion and turned tail for sunlight and home. But it was the sunlight in a clearing which had attracted their eyes, not in the open meadows. They saw only a theatre of felled trunks, and beyond them rank beyond rank, the

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upright trees. The sunlight on Peppi's dun hair evoked no response. It shimmered like watches and rings and bracelets and tassels upon Hugo's hair, to the eye of the dark bird on the edge of the clearing; it shimmered like all those things for which at length he betrayed so inexhaustible an appetite.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!" cried Hans, flopping down clumsily upon the shoulder of the small boy. "Caw! Caw!" he cried, recognizing his master and his doom.

Hugo clapped his hands, his terror converted into breathless excitement. "Caw! Caw!" he croaked too.

Peppi looked on dubiously. There seemed no reason to him why the bird should not have perched upon *his* shoulder. He put his hand out tentatively towards the bird. The beak swept round and pecked savagely at the ball of his thumb. Peppi uttered a howl and fled, turning his feet instinctively towards the sound of an axe in the middle distance. Hugo remained. The air was full of bells by the time he was out of the wood again, goat-bells and cow-bells and church-bells. But the ears of the small boy were full of one sound only, the croak of the raven that had come to its master, abandoning all its own kind.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!" croaked the raven. Henceforth he did not suspend his croakings throughout the history of Hugo Harpf.

CHAPTER TWO

IF you were ignorant of the existence of Midrans as you climbed the Floriansthal westward from the wider valley of Schlamms, you would find yourself with a shock of surprise at the heart of the village, in the square of the White Lamb, almost before you had divined there was a village here at all. The scattered farms and cottages you had already encountered in the higher part of the valley, which for the most part actually belong to the Gemeinde, or corporation, of Midrans, had not necessarily indicated the existence of a village deeper in the recesses of the dark valley. Nor did you suspect that the crude jut of stone which from below seemed to block the valley was the castle hill of Felsenburg, so tumbled and scarred is its masonry seen upon the westward approach. The green amphitheatre upon which Midrans is established is a sudden shell-like scoop beyond the neck of rock by which the Felsenburg is joined to the mountain; so that you have no sight even of the exquisite tapering spire of the village church set upon its own smooth cone, the church of St. Florian. You do indeed, from the Schlamms side of the Felsenburg, catch sight of two or three of the upper farms of Midrans, but you do not relate them to a nucleus below in the forest- and torrent-girdled meadows. You cannot tell that they are not merely isolated houses pitched on an alp like other homesteads further down the valley towards Wilding. It does not detract from the terror of the Felsenburg and the

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awe of Midrans when you perceive that they are set upon a theatre whereon the most grandiose forces of nature played their parts. The fearful perpendicularity of the cliff above the Felsenburg and the path of stony disaster quite clearly traceable to the Sturmbach, then across the torrent itself, and deep into the heart of the steep woods on the further bank, leave no doubt at all that at some time undecided a landslide of terrific proportions took place here in the Floriansthal. Who shall speculate what gods and men were buried under those thunderous stones? Was there an Etrurian fort here at the throat of the gorge to protect the tillage and sable ceremony in the green amphitheatre beyond? The Romans, at least, were not here until after the cataclysm; for though the greater part of the ruin of Felsenburg is mediæval, there is no doubt of what masons built that round tower whose lower courses still stand on the edge of the uneasy rock.

But if a force so sudden and violent provided its platform for the Felsenburg, and probably within the limits of recorded history, the shelves and cones whereon Midrans stands, were planed and chiselled by a more gradual, a more elemental, force. The higher part of the valley is the road of a glacier whose ice has long been melted into the primal waterways of the world. Certain of the farmsteads I had seen were quite certainly built upon lateral moraines, no less than the village of Midrans upon its successive terraces. But the formation was most distinct in the pedestals of the three buildings which hung over the village, suspended against the pine forests; these being the Church of St. Florian on its smooth cone, the house of the priest separated from it by a steep and shadowy ravine, and, furthest away from the village, the Kalvarienkapelle, the Chapel of the Stations of the Cross, under the

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lee of which the villagers of Midrans had for ages disposed their dead.

But of these you caught no glimpse as you climbed the valley towards the Felsenburg. When at last you perceived that the craggy block before you was surmounted by a mansion as craggy as itself, and that its own substance had been hollowed out to form the lower chambers of that mansion, so forbidding the place looked that it did not present itself to you as having been at any period of its existence the tutelary fortress of innocent peasants. Which indeed it had not — not of innocent peasants. The men of Midrans had never been any more renowned for their innocence than the lords of the Felsenburg. But approaching ignorantly from Schlamms, you did not suspect Midrans at all, as I have said. The Felsenburg had been, you considered, the remote stronghold of robber counts, thrust as far into the crude dale as might be from the ordinary thought of the world. But ruin had overtaken the castle long ago. The evil race that retired there with its bloody prizes had been expunged by some race younger and less vicious than itself. Only a few shuffling peasants persisted in this further end of the Floriansthal, and the strong hawks circling above the ruin.

But a minute or two after you had skirted the Felsenburg, you might be refreshing yourself after your day's journey with a flask of wine at the White Lamb. Everywhere was a noise of water and of the sawing of wood and of the hammering of hoofs. Midrans was apparent to you, its painted fronts rising like a huge missal towards the church of Florian and the Calvary Chapel, and above these the hanging woods. If you knew nothing of the fame of Midrans, and if the sun was not yet blocked behind the hump of the Teufelsberg, you might have said to yourself

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what a homely and amiable village you had wandered into! What a wealth of geranium and petunia and carnation in the window-boxes of these pleasant houses! How much the brighter were the colours in the robes of Christopher and George and Florian because of the sombre frame of forest they were set in! You perceived that even the Felsenburg was not wholly a ruin. A wing of the castle that you had not seen from the further side was still intact — not a whole wing, perhaps, but several rooms certainly. The window-frames had glass in them and their red-painted shutters, crossed diagonally with white bars, hung back upon sound hinges against the walls. If you had desired to examine the Felsenburg more closely, you would not have failed to climb towards the house of Franz Harpf, master-painter — a house you had already seen in profile from the further side of the castle. Franz Harpf's house was the uppermost and outermost of the houses of Midrans proper, and though separated from it by an abrupt gulf of air, the nearest to the Felsenburg.

But it is probable that as you approached that house, your interest in the castle of Felsenburg would have abated for the time being. No thoughts of ancient evil and present ruin could have survived so much graciousness, such bright simplicity. (Let me make it clear that I assume you are approaching the threshold of the house of the Miracle Boy twenty or fifteen years ago. Hugo is dead now and Hugo's raven. His house is not so gracious. There are no gay flowers in the window-boxes and the eldest brother of Hugo has no interest in the apricots and the vines and the doves.) Each window, at the time I am speaking of, was intricate with flowers like an illuminated capital in a missal. The fruit-trees lay back complacently against the wall like a Sebastian in the rain of arrows from

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the sun on its journey across the south. A vine framed the doorway; and though the air was too thin and the sun too early hidden, for its grapes to mature, the hanging clusters formed not the least pleasant decoration of the house-front. In between the green branches and behind them you saw the painted saints which generation upon generation of the master-painters of Midrans had laboured at: Lorenz gently recumbent upon his grill, Barbara with her tower, Peter with the key of heaven, and not the least the eponymous Florian, who had now for several centuries protected from burning the home of Franz Harpf.

But there was one detail in which the house-front of Franz Harpf most cynically belied the true character of himself and his house and the whole village of Midrans — the great murmuring dove-cot under the eaves. In the wooden superstructure which surmounted the stone bases of all the houses in Midrans there was a fantastic Hellenism; somehow those principles of lordliest building associated with golden promontories and blue noon had found a crude counterpart in this place of bearded woods and persistent snows. The eaves sloped squat over the wooden upper storey. They looked like shoulders stooping under a weight which sooner or later must tax, but not subdue, them. And these eaves, with their architrave and supporting corbels, provided in dark-red larchwood this strange similitude to the marble pediments of Greek temples. But their decorations were more impermanent. Here were hung in summer and autumn the packed pods of maize. In winter the carved stalactites of larchwood were supplemented by blue stalactites of ice.

But the ancestors of Franz Harpf had found another use for the broad gable over their house. They had set a chamber into the pediment, some metres long and a metre

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deep. And here all day in spring and summer the white pigeons crooned, giving to the whole place an air of extraordinary gentleness, like some demure cottage in an English weald. The birds entered and issued by a single portal at an upper corner of the wire-netting stretched across the front of the dove-cot. From that point extended a bar horizontally where the birds perched, outlined in their frail white beauty against the sullen mountain-side. You heard a pigeon cooing in the middle air as he caught sight of his home. Another bird in the cote lifted his foot to his ear and scratched it like a cat. You said to yourself how goodly a place this is, what gentle people inhabit here. Here is a house that is itself a dove-cot.

And when you approached the doorway and read the legend painted in flowery Gothic letters above the lintel, the pretty illusion was complete. These were the sweet words you read:

*Franz Harpf's Heim
Klein — aber Mein.*

Surely not one of the white pigeons could have murmured a more tender sentiment:

*Franz Harpf's Home
Small — but my own.*

But what was that sudden black flurry of wings? And why are the white pigeons scattering like a cloud into the air, leaving the bar empty upon which they sit, preening their bosoms? This is no other creature than a raven, Hans the raven, flying in from the forest. His brethren in the tree-tops and among the crags will have no commerce with him, for he is a traitor to them and their laws, having transferred his loyalty to a yellow-haired human. If he

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ventures amongst them, they peck at his pate with their hard beaks. He is an outcast there. But in Midrans he is become one of the most notable citizens. And Franz Harpf would as soon see his best milch-goat come to harm as Hans the raven. And the small boy Hugo never goes forth into the pastures or leans on the bridge over the swift stream but the raven is on his shoulder.

Only the white pigeons scatter when the lumbering raven slopes over towards their resting-place. "Caw! Caw! Caw!" succeeds to the soft murmuring that hangs like a spray over the house of Franz Harpf . . . as if Etruria were ousting Bethlehem.

CHAPTER THREE

TO-DAY Bethlehem lords it in the Floriansthal, this being Christmas eve. There is mystery afoot in the living-room of every house in Midrans. The children must not enter the room till sunset, and the elder lads who dragged in the living fir-tree from the wood must pretend they have forgotten all about it or never really knew they were doing it at all. Sister Teresa's own special little girls, the little girls whose attentions never wander from her mild eyes when she is holding forth in the school-room, whose hands always seek hers in the school-yard when the other little girls are screaming and tearing each other's hair — these special little girls spend most of the day on their knees in the church. Little Hugo's sweetheart, Nanni Tratzl, was never one of these, I grieve to say, though the time was to come when her fervours exceeded theirs as a wood-fire exceeds a taper. Lots of the little boys, Hugo among them, make their way up to the church, but that is purely for the purpose of sliding down again on their toboggans. Hugo is feeling rather pleased with himself, for his father chose him to-day out of all his brothers to go and get the Christmas fruit-cake, the Zelten, sliced by the priest. It was always possible to keep count of Hugo's elder brothers, for there were just two, Franzl, the eldest born, and Alois. The girl, Fanni, came in between, but she did not count; she counted only just less than her mother. There followed Erich and Ludl and Johann and Seppl and others. Every year a new younger brother made his

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appearance. That was why it was so easy to get mixed up about the younger brothers. But old Harpf did not even get mixed up. He took no notice of them. So that it might not have been quite so great an honour as Hugo imagined that his father singled him out to go up to the priest and get the Zelten cut into. The yellow hair doubtless did it, asserting itself among the brown stubs and the black stubs of his diminishing brothers.

A goodly confection is the Zelten of Christmas day. Hazel-nuts and pears and currants and figs and spices are compounded into its heavy succulence, and I know not what else besides. It is the custom that a small emissary go forth from every house in the village to get one of the worthies to cut the first slice, be he Burgermeister or priest, chief farmer or schoolmaster. It was to the priest in his high balconied house that Hugo went forth, his cake wrapped in a kerchief. They did not meet then for the first time nor the last time, face to face in one small chamber. But in their meeting upon that Christmas day, the priest among his sanctities, and the boy with his black familiar on his shoulder, there was a foreshadowing of the end. Father Josef was preoccupied. There was much to do that day, and Hugo was not the first little boy who had brought the Zelten over to be sliced by him.

"Greet thee God, boy!" said he, hardly noticing who the boy was who stood before him.

"Greet God, high-worthy one!" replied Hugo, removing the kerchief from the cake. The priest lifted a knife from the table and drew a cross with it on the cake's rich surface. He was about to cut into it when a flurry and flap of wings sent the knife hurtling from his fingers on to the floor. The raven uttered a hoarse caw of triumph as he flew from the cake on to the painted wooden dove that

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hung like a lamp-shade from the ceiling. Then he lifted his beak ruminatively into the air as he savoured the plum he had captured.

"A pest on thy bird!" cried Father Josef.

"Hansl! Hansl!" besought Hugo. "Come down!"

"Let him not enter into this place again!"

"No, Herr Father, no. . . ." The child was beginning to blubber.

"Or I shall use this knife on his throat instead!" said the priest crossly. He disliked having his effects disturbed. He suddenly became conscious he had never liked the wicked-looking creature. He had always disapproved of the fuss the villagers made of it. You might have thought it a baptized Christian.

The threat, proceeding from such august lips, terrified the boy. He uttered a loud howl of anguish. The raven dropped his plum and lurched over from his sacred perch. He made a sudden ugly peck above the priest's cheek-bone. He was destined one day to make a more fiendish assault.

"Devil!" cried the priest. "Take the monster away!"

But the bird was already gone through the open door. Ten minutes later Hugo found him sitting innocently on the window-sill at home, opening his beak to its widest as if to let the bright wintry sun penetrate the Stygian depths of his body. The white pigeons had been coaxed out of the dark cow-shed by the illusive warmth of the day. They were cooing upon the cross-bar which stuck out obliquely from their cote, as if they were turning over the idea between them that it was time to give up their winter quarters and betake themselves again to the open cote and the blue air.

But soon the cold twilight came and the frost. The doves

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were folded among the rafters above the sweet breaths of the cows, Schwalbel and Wicht, Tsotl and Ducksa and the mild-eyed Gretl, beloved before all her sisters by Hugo, before Gams and Noine and even Putzl the small bull-calf in his own tiny stall. The cows in their shed on this day of Bethlehem in the Floriansthal and overhead a bright star. And within doors a hundred smaller stars flickering on the fingery branches of the fir-tree, and the children gathered round them doing reverence to the little naked waxen doll which was the Christ-child, high on the topmost twig, the ranks of bare-haired children and Franz Harpf towering above them with his vast ape-like arms and the curiously small firm hands.

Doubtless their mother was here too, and Fanni, their sister. Yes, indeed they were, pushed away behind the stove. They had worked hard all day to produce this glittering pageantry of streamers and tinsel thread and hanging sweets and bound gifts, and their place was in the shadow now. Sweet and clear rose the voices of the children . . . "*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*" . . . The gruff voice of Franz Harpf and the cracking voice of his eldest-born, Franzl, gave volume to the sweetness. Fearful and diffident, as from another valley, entered the thin accents of Fanni. The mother was silent, her hands folded below her bosom. Whither then were her eyes addressed, those faint blue eyes which Hugo alone of all her children had received from her? She stood motionless behind the stove, as if neither her ears heard nor her eyes saw.

Or did she indeed hear, or did she indeed see?

She took no part in the joyous skirmish which followed the singing of the carol. Franzl unbound for himself the green and white leg-casings she had knitted for his sturdy calves. For Alois there was a tie, for Hugo a knife. No one

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was forgotten, excepting the two women. What need had they for presents? Nor was Fipps, the black-haired hound, forgotten, nor Hans the raven. Blood-red among the black leafage, for each a cooked sausage was suspended, scrupulously equal so that no jealousy might be aroused.

"Fipps!" cried the eldest boy, removing his dainty from the tree. "Take!"

Fipps approached slowly, wagging his hindquarters. His bright eyes stared rapturously at his imminent feast. He halted a moment coyly, and pretended to look away, uninterested.

"Take!" cried Franzl again.

The dog sprang like an arrow and nipped his sausage with delicate precision from the string by which it was suspended.

"Hansl!" cried Hugo, following his elder brother. "Take!"

There was no lurch of wings, no snap of beak.

"Hansl! Take!"

Hans was not anywhere to be seen. The semicircle of small boys broke into confusion. Where was Hans? Where was Hans? He was not on the stove or under the chairs or behind the crucifix or hidden in the flaring tree. Where was Hans?

Then the voice of Fanni broke into the hubbub. "The Christ-child! The Christ-child! Who has taken the Christ-child?" She wrung her hands. She snivelled piteously.

It was true. There was no waxen doll smiling down from the topmost twig of the fir-tree upon the little Christian pates. Who had stolen the Christ-child? Everyone knew.

"Woe upon us and upon our house!" proclaimed the

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toneless voice of Hugo's mother from the shadow behind the stove. "Woe upon us! Christ is gone from our house!"

A silence fell upon the room. An ignited needle spurted on the fir-tree. Fipps whined uneasily, forgetting the scarlet prize between his paws. The elder children looked towards their mother curiously, for it was not her custom to let her voice be heard when the family was gathered together. One or two of the younger children whimpered. Franz Harpf strode over to her, lifting the back of his hand towards her face.

"Hold thy mouth, *Fackengrint!*" he thundered. "What is with thee, cow of a woman?"

CHAPTER FOUR

THE life of Hans the raven, then, was not free from alarms and excursions even in these earliest years of his relations with Hugo, though it was only on Hugo's return from Munich that Hans's friends and enemies were to establish themselves in irreconcilable camps. As I said earlier, Hans was anathema among his kinsmen in the woods. If ever he ventured any distance beyond the nearest fringe of pine-trees, he was back in a minute or two, uttering hoarse croaks of terror. With his master, on the other hand, he ventured anywhere. His swarthy enemies dared not attack him when the boy's hair gleamed beside him, a shield of salvation. The four-footed beasts in Midrans too, dogs and cats and goats, looked up at him where he sat ensconced in the white confusion of a blossoming cherry, looked up and lusted. Not that his behaviour was void of provocation. Clumsily lurching down upon them, he had tweaked their ears and was off before horn or fang or claw had time to exact a penalty. When Hugo was absent, it was Fipps the hound who was his doughtiest supporter. A curious relationship existed between the dog and the raven, an offensive and defensive alliance with strictly-defined territories and obligations. In the house of Franz Harpf the creatures were frankly enemies. Whatever in the nature of solid sustenance they could steal from each other they stole. That was a convention, and despite much angry barking and croaking it was repeated.

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But when either attempted to disinter the spoils of the other from its tomb in the garden where he had buried it, then the fur or the feathers flew. Yet it was also further understood that no enmities existed on the edge of the big tub of water beside the potato-patch. Here Fipps could raise himself on his fore-paws and let them dangle into the tub and his tongue throw up the water noisily, without fear of anything but a moral admonition from Hans. For it was with the utmost fastidiousness that Hans drank and performed his ablutions. He lifted a drop of water in his beak and then savoured it delicately, like a wine-taster, rolling away the black eyeballs till only the blue-grey meditative film occupied the sockets. He was, indeed, a wine-taster, of no mean palate or enthusiasm, and one of Franz Harpf's most diligent occupations was to get him drunk. But, poised on the edge of the tub, savouring the water, he seemed the most scrupulous and temperate of fowls. His potations ended, he seized the edge of the tub more firmly between his claws and immersed the front of his body; then he reversed himself and bathed his hinder section. This ceremony was performed sacredly three times a day. To sum up then, within the walls of Franz Harpf's house Fipps and Hans were enemies. On the edge of the water-tub a benevolent neutrality existed. Beyond the confines of Harpf's sparse acres an active alliance united them.

That was why Peppi Ganner had to go about it very carefully when he attempted to steal Hans. Both Hugo and Fipps had to be out of the way before Peppi dared to whip out the piece of sacking he had been carrying about for days and to throw it over the bird's head. Peppi was, in fact, the little boy who had been wandering with Hugo that day in the woods when the raven first rendered him-

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self out of the darkness; he had never forgiven either Hans or Hugo for the choice of master the bird had made. It is probable that the Ganner family was in the conspiracy, for the whole village envied the Harpfs their possession of the strange fowl. At all events it is not probable that they could not overhear the raven's desperate cawing in the lightless interior attic whither Peppi brought him, struggling and swearing in the sacking. Peppi's first business was to clip all the bird's feathers close to the body and to nip his tail, the idea being that even if he escaped from his attic, he would not be able to fly away from the Ganner house until he had transferred his affection to the gracious Peppi. This was immediately followed by a presentation of gifts, apples and sweets and cake and sausage, on which the boy spent all the farthings he had laboriously acquired for months. Hans did not appreciate the kindness. He did not even let Peppi execute it. He neither ate nor drank. A week later he managed to make his escape late at night. Possibly he had become so emaciated that he managed to thrust himself between the planking that separated the inner from the outer attic. He flopped clumsily to the ground and managed to get some yards on his way home in a sequence of hops and short painful flights. It is certain that one of his many four-footed enemies would have got the better of him that night, if Fipps had not been prowling about in a state of the utmost dejection. With an ecstatic bark, the dog recognized his beloved enemy. A minute later he had presented himself in Franz Harpf's living-room, the wretched plucked creature held tenderly between his jaws. Such an outcry greeted him that people were roused in their beds in the houses on the lower slopes. Either Franz Harpf is beating his wife, they said, or Hans the raven is found. No, it cannot be his wife,

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because she is always silent. And it cannot be his daughter, because there is exultation in that sound. Praised be Jesus, Hans the raven is found!

For months after, Fanni and Hugo rubbed the bird with warm oil and cosseted it against the stove, while the feathers sprouted grotesquely again from the nipped edges. They brought him round to sound health, but in his curious sidelong lurch Hans carried a remembrancer of the episode with Peppi Ganner to the end of his days.

A year or two later, in a dark vault of the White Lamb, a more desperate mischance befell the raven. It was the evening of Corpus Christi, and when the fact was recalled many years later, it was not without a wagging of wise tongues. It was possible that had the multitude of black cats worked their will on Hans that night, there would have been no story to tell of Hugo and his miracles; and that not because it was ever deemed that the hapless bird himself was responsible for those strange events. Hugo it was who worked miracles; nothing out of the course of nature was attributed to Hans, excepting, of course, that his first appearance was surrounded by so much portentous speculation. But nobody doubted that if Hans had disappeared at an early stage from Hugo's history, the youth would have been ultimately not the creature he was. It was true that the mere absence of Hans would not have prevented the appearance in the valley of the Hauptmann Oskar Tachezy, nor that gentleman's subsequent and successful endeavours to send Hugo to the Akademie in Munich. The mere anatomy of Hugo's existence might have been the same. But it is impossible not to feel with the villagers that its general spiritual character would have been entirely, however subtly, different.

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All Midrans was gathered into the great chestnut-canopied gardens of the White Lamb, that evening of Corpus Christi. Corpus Christi, the priest's wiseacres insisted later. But it seems to me, no less than to Hugo's men, that if the Body of Christ desired to revenge itself for offences which were in the main as yet uncommitted, if they were ever committed at all, it seems to me that it chose dubious ministers. For the black cats of the White Lamb were an unholy brood. The whole inn swarmed with them (though, despite their multitude, they had as much as they could do to keep down the mice in the attics and the rats in the barns). Skinny creatures they were, however high they feasted upon nights of slaughter. They had long legs and meagre bellies and green slanting eyes. In silent companies they gathered together upon the ridges of roofs and stared at each other in inexhaustible hostility; or they padded male after female, or female after male, through the intricate lines of sprouting vegetables. But they were silent always, excepting for a low noise that sometimes scraped along their ribs. A sinister and complex politics heaved among the swarthy brood, but it never released itself in a great yowl and clash among the midnight stars. It was their custom, rather, to visit their rancours upon the new generation as it was perpetually delivered among sacks of rye or the mangers of the cattle. Fathers abolished their offspring, and avenged their cuckoldry upon the offspring of their enemies. Even the nursing mothers displayed towards their young an unparalleled callousness; so that it was a matter of wonder that the brood endured at all. It endured none the less, and mightily. The creatures rubbed against skirts or legs like a gliding vapour or suddenly put out a sharp claw upon the nape of the neck. Or from among their spectral ribs their own occult

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issued, but you saw nowhere at all the long legs and green slanting eyes.

They did not love each other, the black cats of the White Tomb, for they had no love in them at all; but one thing united their hatred and resolved their confusions as if by the wand of an enchanter. It was the appearance of Hans the raven, loping down sideways from the top branch of the cherry-tree. Upon him all their odium concentrated together because he pertinaciously jeered at them, telling them that all their air of mystery might impose on humans, but he for his part saw it for the shoddy thing it was; or whether merely they could not forgive him for the front he put upon them by possessing wings when they possessed none. Whatever the case was, all their tracking and convolutions ceased when his mocking croak on the shoulder of Hugo rang out from the trees. They crouched down upon their bellies and stared upon him patiently, saying as he was there to be stared at. Our time will come and the green eyes. Our time will come.

It came upon the evening of Corpus Christi: all Midlanders, as I said, being gathered in the beer-garden of the town, attired in its festival finery. The procession had been unusually successful that year, and the electric light streamed brilliantly down upon the impromptu altar to the left of the doorway of the inn where the bright cavalry had halted, the volunteers fired their volleys, and the priest had uttered benediction. The altar would not be dismantled until next morning, and the branches and flowers which intertwined it looked metallic in the close glare. In a mystical sense than the everlasting lamp that burned before the altar in the church of St. Florian and in the chapel of the Calvary this electric light slung over the square was everlasting too. There was power enough in

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the waters of Midrans to keep all Paris brightly lit and it was cheaper to keep a light burning all day than to provide a switch to extinguish it. I, too, in my time, stood under that harsh light, which only made the darkness beyond its province more intense on nights of no moon. But the empty space in the wall against which that altar had once been constructed, was occupied by the monumental limbs of the painted Hugo, with the painted raven upon his shoulder. Upon the earlier night I am recording, they were the centre of a hilarious group at one of the long tables in the beer-garden. It included matrons and maidens in tight bodices and aprons of stiff brocade, men and youths with great burnished chests glistening under opened shirts of homespun, and the family of Franz Harpf—the old man (but he was not old then) and in their degrees, Franzl, Hugo, Alois, Eric, Ludl, Johann, Seppl. Even Frau Harpf was there that night, though there had been no time to see to the gold tassels in her hat, which Hans had pecked into tatters that very day. There had been no time to attend to the blue weals in her forearm, likewise due to the sudden comical peckings of the raven. It was one of his favourite diversions, for every peck was greeted with roars of laughter on the part of old Franz and his sons. These weals, fortunately, were covered by Frau Harpf's sleeves that night, and she sat sipping the fiery distillation of gentian among the other women, mutely. All her family were there that night, excepting, of course, her daughter, Fanni. But Fanni was not expected to be anywhere at any time, excepting at the wash-tub or at the sink or in the potato-patch. Fanni was not expected to make any public appearance at all, excepting at funerals, whence all the knotted ferocity of her father's arm could not hold her. Then briefly, tragically,

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he became a living creature, a young woman among the young women of the village — she, with her mother beside her. But her mother walked in the sombre procession like a wooden image moving, she herself wailed like a friend, hopelessly, as if calamities were due and not all the banded saints of God Himself could avert them. And when the last clod of earth had been thrown into the heaped grave and the peasants made their way again towards field or forest, she, too, went back to the wash-tub or the potato-patch. And when there was no more washing to be done or potatoes to be dug up, there were alwaysables to scrub or stockings to darn. No time for Fanni to leave her work even upon the evening of Corpus Christi. The heart of Frau Harpf ached for her, as she sat sipping the liqueur of gentian. But she said no word.

Franz Harpf was getting the raven drunk, and the raven was lending himself to the occupation complacently. He held his own without dishonour among the drunkards of Midrans. It was not the least of Frau Harpf's domestic tribulations that no wine-tumbler was safe from Hans. As soon as a little wine were left at the bottom of a glass, Hans lost no time in pushing it towards the edge of the table with his beak, till it fell on to the floor and smashed, leaving a pleasant pool of wine for Hans's delectation. That night at the White Lamb, too many eyes were concentrated on him to make him feel the time propitious for his tumbler-mocking trick; and before long he found it unnecessary. Gladly the after glass was passed over to him. In each he inserted his beak and assumed a drop of wine with decorum, throwing back his head and testing the vintage carefully. The decorum became less marked. Amid squeals of laughter from the children and encouraging roars from the elders he flopped more and more clumsily between the ranks

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tumblers from end to end of the table. Then finally, like a drunken man staggering with uncanny speed over towards a tree-trunk to seize it before he collapses, he lunged desperately towards Hugo's shoulders, spilling the thick wine on to more than one brocaded lap and naked knee, and so attained the sanctuary of Hugo's shoulder. There, with a peevish grunt, he sank into his own shoulders, and fell asleep.

Or perhaps not asleep. He fell into a stupor rather. More than once he raised his tipsy voice in protest against a cow mooing from some barn near at hand or against Fipps the dog, his friend and enemy, lying between his stretched paws under the table. That night, at least, Fipps was his friend, his only friend. The others had made him drunk and silly. Even Hugo had forgotten him, gorged and no less silly among his brothers. Fipps noticed the green slanting eyes, or noticed them when, like marsh-lights, they floated balefully away into the blackness. Fipps and the mother of Hugo, Frau Harpf. She, too, noticed them. They had her blessing.

It was perhaps half an hour later when suddenly Fipps uttered a short yelp, staccato, from between his paws, as if someone had kicked him. A moment later he sprang out from under the table and stood rigid, like a dog cast in steel, his tail sticking out obliquely behind him like a rod. His eyes started from his head, each short black hair poked out like a wire from his body. So he stood for five seconds, voiceless, paralysed. Upon the sixth second he dissolved into flesh again. He picked up his four feet from the ground as if he hated it for impeding him. He hurled himself like a wind down the beer-garden and into the vaulted passage of the inn. Then over against the large crucifix outside the stout door of the huge groined cellar, he

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checked himself, lifted his head, and made the most desolate and appalling clamour that dog had ever made in Midrans.

I do not like to let my imagination shut itself up for long on the further side of that door, in the darkness only lit up by the countless green eyes. There was no light in the eyes of Hans the raven flapping about heavily from vat to vat, with all his mischief for the first time completely exorcized, with more than the fear upon him of the fox at bay against a wall or the rat in a trap or the condemned man in a cell. There was no light in Hans's eyes; and if the howling of Fipps had not brought Hugo and his father within a few seconds to the cellar, there would have been no eyes at all.

A curious perversion of the ultimate event it would have been — Hans, who was to peck out an eye from a socket, to have his own clawed clean. . . .

Yet I cannot help feeling that Hans, who was a connoisseur in the uncanny, must have registered a sort of ironic approval of the end which seemed so certain. He had never known the door of this cellar to have been closed before, in all his prolonged and intimate acquaintance with the management of the White Lamb. It was that fool of a new waitress, Mariandl, the one with the big goitre — it was her fault; the one who came from the Pusterthal, where she had had five children and no husband.

But it was clever of the green-eyed ones to realize that Hansl had had a drop too much; to be so clearly aware that to get rid of the noises in his head he often went over to these huge hooped barrels in the cellar. But it was cleverest of them to anticipate that Mariandl, for no reason in the world excepting to throw him to their teeth, would shut the door that night upon them and him. The uncanny was Hansl's own particular territory, and he must

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have appreciated their deportment and versatility. They were not mere cats that evening. They slunk like the wolves he had seen once or twice during frightful winters, driven in their hunger from the nucleus of the glaciers whence no man could extirpate them. They bounded like deer among the ridges, from barrel to barrel. They clung from the ribs of the groined roof by one claw, like bats.

But they were silent. They made not even the tiny whining of bats. Their green eyes shone, but did not spit and sparkle, like match-heads. Though for his own part he croaked and croaked as if he were himself a whole tree-top of ravens, they made no noise at all. Would the yellow-haired one never come then, never? He, the young master, for whose little shoulder he had given up the goodly feel of the fir branches between his claws, for whose service he had abandoned all hope of a mating in the cold high hills with some female, proud and solitary as he had himself been once in the days before the yellow hair cozened him out of secrecy? Would he never come? And a claw was in his wing, at length, for he could not evade them for ever, and a tooth was about his neck. . . .

It had been not his own blood pounding. It had been Fipps, the four-footed one, making that muted clamour beyond the thick door. Wide, wide, the door was hurled. Light streamed in upon the hideousness. The green light was quenched out of their furtive eyes. Mere cats they were, nothing more than wingless cats, slinking away between boots on their mangy bellies. Yellow hair! Lovely master! He fell upon the small shoulder like a bolt, croaking and sobbing against the yellow hair.

I do not wish to produce the impression that during the early part of his devotion to Hugo the life of Hans was one perpetual series of hairbreadth escapes; but I still have the

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last and the closest of them to tell of, and it occurs to me that the vicissitudes of Hans were so circumstantial in the memory of the villagers, precisely because Hans it was who was the conspicuous member of the partnership. The boy Hugo does not isolate himself; he is throughout, as has been said earlier, a quite ordinary little boy. There are no records of him tumbling down precipices and carried neatly, by some prognostic manifestation of the powers he was later to exercise, into the fork of a convenient tree. He does not fall ill and recover miraculously. If he has a cold in the chest, he recovers through the offices of dog-dripping, held to be a notable specific in those parts. If the child suffers from indigestion, the malady is not deemed to be the operation of internal demons, so much as the result of eating a boiled egg, a dangerous article of diet, those folk assert. Nor is there any incident adduced which might seem to portend that unparalleled war waged a decade later between Conrad von Felsenburg, the feudal lord of the Floriansthal, and the peasant youth, Hugo Harpf; I should say, rather, no incident indicating any especial animosity as between Conrad and Hugo individually. The families of Harpf and von Felsenburg had disliked each other for generations; for whereas the Harpfs (and not a few of the other families of Midrans) deemed the von Felsenburgs to be poachers on a large scale, stowing away indifferently into their bags the virginity of forests and of maidens, the Harpfs had been just as distinguished poachers on a small scale, whether their game happened to be a chamois or a tree ripe for burning. The Harpfs were as ingenious as their masters, neither had ever been clumsily caught in the act; it had always been agreed by both the lordly and the humble families that the unhappy Harpf who was brought down by the gun of a von Felsen-

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burg a century ago on the shoulder of the Teufelswand had, in point of fact, been digging up roots with the barrel of his gun, and the Herr Baron, who persisted in the chase despite his failing sight, had imagined him to be a buck. The hereditary, the almost sacerdotal, profession of the Harpfs, carvers and painters of saints, had never succeeded in making the odour of poached Gamsbraten, roast chamois, less appetizing. The antiquity of the blood of the von Felsenburgs had never succeeded in making the vulgar flesh of village virgins less appetizing. There was no love lost between the grim house that shut in Midrans from the valley, and the painted, flowery, dove-engirdled homestead facing towards it over the hostile gulf of air.

None the less, I repeat, no incident records any especial awareness of Hugo and von Felsenburg regarding each other during Hugo's boyhood; this may have been due partly to the fact that Hugo was, except for his raven, a not distinguishable lad among the other lads, and more especially to the fact that von Felsenburg, succeeding to the estate and title when Hugo was about nine, spent the greater part of the next few years engaged upon those obscure metropolitan machinations which he only suspended, it appears, when it seemed advisable for him to lie low. Upon which occasions he returned briefly to his ancient house, whence looking down, he might distinguish among the girls watering the beasts at the village trough, or descending in their bravery from the church, which of them might prove for him the most satisfactory sharer of his discretionary exile.

Having, therefore, in Hugo's early life no incident to narrate in itself dramatic, or even such as a nervous brain might expound as dramatic in view of what was to happen, I am left with that final episode regarding Hans the raven,

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in which the bird survived a more desperate peril than the tail-clipping Peppi Ganner submitted him to, and even the brood of cats in the cellar of the White Lamb.

It occurred upon the day when Wildhauer, the miller, was buried. It was a day which the old man, with the utmost contumacy, had postponed from year to year and decade to decade. Nothing could persuade him to die; and when his eldest son, following a fashion customary in those regions, determined to eject him bodily from the Wildhauer patrimony, which, in the course of nature, he should have inherited long ago, old Wildhauer broke three of his heir-apparent's ribs and smashed his nose. Young Wildhauer (but he was sixty-five) died of a pneumonia in the autumn of that year. The next heir died three years later. But these reductions in his staff by no means impelled old Wildhauer to call in foreign labour. He assumed the duties of his defunct sons along with his own, and his third and fourth sons grew old and rheumatic under his unquenchable eyes. Finally, at a legendary age, lifting upon his back a load of flour which might have cracked the vertebræ of an ox, he suddenly crumpled under the weight, and fell dead under it.

Midrans determined to honour his obsequies with the dignities which were his due. Midrans was at no time loth to celebrate funerals or births, of public saints or private citizens; to ratify weddings, simple or golden, to welcome into the state of Christian communion, to mourn sicknesses, to glorify recoveries. Midrans was at no time loth to celebrate anything or to celebrate nothing at all. And there was no distinguishing, from the aspect of the celebration, what nature of event had inspired it. An air of equally profound and savage gloom attended a wedding and a funeral. A soul was welcomed into or out of the

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bosom of God with drinking as deep and furious, quarrelling as bloody, lust as incontinent. The same reverberant rattle of gun-fire at the butts, the same blaring of brass from the village band, filled the day with echoes.

The long procession wound behind the chanting priest towards the cemetery under the Kalvarienberg. Hardly any old man or infant was so uncertain of his feet as to stay at home on the day of the funeral of old Wildhauer. All Midrans was there in its degrees, and the people who dwelt in the isolated houses of the Floriansthal, and even that almost speechless race who occupied the ultimate arid steadings in the rifts of the mountains below the glacier. Not the Burgermeister and his family were lacking, nor Prandl of the White Lamb and his family, nor the Tratzls, the Wilds, the Ganners, the Harpfs, the Shneggs, the Tambosis. The scion of an older house than these was present, immediately following the relatives of the deceased, whom, in his graciousness, he permitted to precede him. This was none other than Conrad von Felsenburg, the lord of the valley, who two years ago had succeeded to his domain. A tall man was von Felsenburg and dark, with a high nose slightly misshaped, and eyes thrust deep into concave sockets. Very demurely he walked that day behind the mourning music and the priest chanting and the aged children of the dead miller, who had seemed for so long so much older than the old man himself. You might have thought that no idea was in his head saving such as so sad an event might piously engender, even in the lordly head of a von Felsenburg. But it is not likely that even the priest thought so, wholly concerned as he seemed to be with his incantation, or that the count's bailiff thought so, Martin Huber, or any mother of comely daughters. It is certain that for his future antagonist, little Hugo Harpf,

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he had no eye at all, even if Hugo removed for a moment his tufted hat of green velours with its bright green ribbon round the crown, and revealed among the shorn pates and the black pates his disk of shining hair. It is not improbable that Hugo, for his part, was occupied with the thought of that gaunt man, concerning whom he must have overheard whisperings more than once in this company of men and that company of women. He must have been aware of that gaunt man who had slain, not in his own person, a Harpf of an earlier day in the cold hills. Perhaps, however, even so early, that dour contemplation was chased from his mind by the spectacle of the large brown eyes and red cheeks of Nanni Tratzl walking with her hand in her mother's hand in the procession a few yards away. No, perhaps not so early. Hugo was but eleven, Nanni a year younger. And yet I cannot forbear from wondering whether, being so very lovely a little maiden, her years completely absolved her from the meditations of von Felsenburg. For when he returned from Moscow in a year or two, or it might be Budapest or Biarritz some years later, how toothsome an apple might this be, ready for the cunning tooth to nibble at, in these unjaded orchards of Midrans!

These were the occasions upon which youths and maidens beheld each other, summoned from the making of cheeses in dairies or the following of ploughs in the meadows. They beheld each other, a message passed between them, the fluttering of her eyelid, the sudden pounding of blood into his cheeks. And not infrequently another maiden looked on and tore out the hair that night of the girl who had been her chief friend since infancy, or another youth looked on who daubed his fist, or his knife even, with the blood of his mate, in the charcoal-burning hut or

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the wood-feller's compound. And if the unmarried became thus aware of each other in the procession slowly filing towards the cemetery, how much the more will it be taken for granted that a married man may contemplate his legally-wedded spouse, if a thought of her strikes him!

And it so happened that, as the procession turned a sharp angle by the small shrine of the Virgin at the further end of the village, the procession for a few yards was walking almost parallel with itself. So that Franz Harpf became aware that his retinue was incomplete; son by son walked properly, but by the side of the girl Fanni, as hideous as usual with snuffling and sobbing and contortion of features, there was no other woman attending him, as a woman should, honouring the man that deigned to marry her and put clothes on to her back. The calm one was absent, the speechless one, who neither wept nor laughed, neither upon funerals nor weddings.

Which was strange; for Frau Harpf had certainly set out in the procession half an hour ago, attired in the black weeds that made her pale face so much paler, till she seemed like a taper that has been quenched. For what reason had Frau Harpf dropped out? And for what reason did her husband proceed to do likewise, before the procession had reached the first slopes of the Kalvarienberg? It is not to be believed that he doubted her wifely fidelity; for, after they have taken their marriage vows, no women in any country are chaster than these, and at all times, maid or wife, Frau Harpf had been chaster than all. Never upon the wall of the house of her girlhood had jilted lover daubed the fiddle of derision; nor, upon the morning that followed her wedding, had half a dozen lovers left each a crude cradle upon his doorstep to inform Franz Harpf that he had had predecessors. It was not, I say, because he

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doubted her fidelity that Franz Harpf sidled his huge girth behind an ash and waited for the procession to pass by, that he might unobserved return to his own house. Nor could he explain why he was so certain that it was to his own house he must repair, and at once. It was not in him to fear for his wife's health; sickness received no quarter or compassion in the house of Franz Harpf, except if it was Hans the raven or Fipps the dog who was sick. Then there would be so much preparing of poultices or rubbings with warm oil as any creature sick in a Vienna drawing-room was likely to receive. It was true that Frau Harpf had been more silent than usual lately, queerer somehow; though her queerness did not interrupt the efficient performance of her duties. She baked, scrubbed, knitted, chopped, dug, churned, as powerfully as usual. He did not fear she threatened to leave him wifeless, a condition of inconvenience for several reasons.

She had been like this, queerer, her eyes had been emptier, since the day of Hugo's confirmation, a month earlier, in the great painted church at Schlamms, since the day of the wildest joke perpetrated by the champion raven of the mountains.

It would have been not merely his wildest, but his last, had Franz Harpf not returned to his house that day of old Wildhauer's funeral, on finding his wife missing from the procession. His instinct had not failed him. She had gone home; she was in the living-room duly, but she did not lift her eyes at the sound of his huge boots thumping in through the doorway. Hans the raven was there too, and he also did not move when Franz Harpf came into the room. He did not move, because he could not. A wire was bound about each of his legs of cracked jet; the other ends of the wires were fastened around two heavy weights

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from the weighing-machine on which Franz Harpf weighed his starches and mineral dyes. Frau Harpf must have performed the task with a strange, I must even say, with a hieratic, precision. For as she towered over the miserable bird, a knife in her hand and a rosary over her wrist, it was precisely a priestess she seemed, seeking to exorcise the antique dark gods of Midrans out of the heart of her son, where, in the shape of this bird, they had taken lodgment. Two goutts of blood welled from her wrists, these also curiously symmetrical, where the beak, more deadlily than before, had pecked at her. As Franz Harpf entered, the raven neither moved nor turned his head, as if he had recognized in that taut human a more frightful enemy than all the green-eyed cats. He had cawed himself dumb in that vault at the White Lamb. Here, in this place where he had so long lorded it, he was voiceless as a painted bird. The head was thrown back, revealing the grey-white feathers of the neck, as if to invite the keen edge that slowly, rigidly, moved towards it. It was almost as if the bird invited the knife and the shedding of his own fateful blood, so that all the doom that hung over the small innocent lad might thus be averted.

But Franz Harpf did not see it so; the thought of losing the creature which had meant for him so many a quart of wine did not appeal to him. He disapproved of moods and tantrums, particularly among women. He went over to her and smote her head with his fist; the knife dropped from her fingers, she herself fell like a log upon the floor. He released the bird and strode back through the village to the cemetery, for he deemed it would be disrespectful if he too did not throw his handful of earth into the open grave of old Wildhauer, that doughty man. When he and his children returned at midday, Frau Harpf set before them

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a steaming dish of bacon, cut into huge cubes and swimming in fat. An extravagant dish, it was true, but this was no ordinary day; and the rifle-shots were already rattling furiously at the butts under the hill.

I have stated that the most I can do by way of giving a sketch of Hugo's boyhood amounts to a tale of the vicissitudes of Hans. Even the episode which, in a spiritual, or perhaps a doctrinal sense, brings his boyhood to a close, does not omit that immanent bird. It was that very fact which at length roused to her strange action that silent and pious woman who was his mother. At least, the poor lady might have held with some justice, at least upon the day of her son's confirmation into the faith of his father's fathers he would be released from that companionship which had always, in some secret and desperate manner, seemed a servitude. She took pains to have her son photographed that day at some little photographer's shanty in Schlamms, a day when the bishop came to the vast convent-chapel to receive into the body of the church the small lads and maidens who were ripe for that privilege in Schlamms itself and the neighbouring valleys. I saw the photograph in the house of his brother Franzl (for though the father Franz was still alive during my sojourn in the valley, his house and his strength had gone from him; he was querulous shadow who once had been such tumultuous substance). I recall the photograph vividly, for of all the images of Hugo I had seen it was the only one unattended by the raven. In place of the bird on his shoulder, he carried in his left hand a garishly-coloured candle, tied to which was a bow of cheap silk, inscribed with holy script, and resolving into two fringed streamers. He holds a prayer-book in his gloved white hand, and a spray of artificial blossom

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is stuck in his button-hole. Some of these objects were doubtless photographer's properties, unless the photograph was taken on the day of his first communion. But Franzl assured me they were not, or Ludl, rather, the next younger brother but one to Hugo, whom Hugo preferred to them all. Franzl, the head of the family, took less interest in the career of the Miracle Boy than almost anyone else in Midrans, being a grosser version of his father, and concerned chiefly with the operations of the stallion he had lately bought. The photograph was taken on the day of Hugo's confirmation, and the mother, doubtless, had insisted that he should hold a Corpus Christi candle in his hand. So might the demon be held at bay whose wings she heard all night and all day in her ears, and she did not know if they flapped in this same room with her or in the icy welter of the further mountains. Or did they beat in her own head; or were they drumming inexorably down towards the scree of the Floriansthal, the forests, the houses, the porch of her own house, the doomed head of her son?

She seems to have put all her energies into making little Hugo that day look as smart as any town boy. The other boys, whose photographs I saw all the way from Franzl downwards, look much more modest. Hugo is attired in a suit of black velours, piped with braid. It is only in the stockings and the feet that you see him manifestly the little peasant boy, the lie of his coarse-knitted stockings, and the splay of his feet in their huge boots. These things were beyond Frau Harpf's ministrations, or more likely, being a peasant woman, she was not aware they put her picture out of joint.

Picture the loaded carts jogging in to Schlamms that day from the valleys around. Many of them must have set

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off before dawn, parents and godparents, small youths in their new homespun, small maidens in white, with a white veil fastened back from the forehead under a wreath of flowers. Among this shy crowd of children, Hugo Harpf is known to us; and so is Peppi Ganner, not so shy as most; and so is Nanni Tratzl, the least shy of all, with her cheeks blooming like apples fit for any orchard of God. Picture the bishop standing upon the top step of the chancel, between those flowery gates of wrought-iron beaten year in, year out, during half his lifetime two centuries ago, by a poor smith in the Floriansthal. The bishop's hands are joined before him, where he stands towards the kneeling children. Invocation and response follow duly. He extends his hands. There is more invocation, more response. And now, as he sits upon his chair, his solemn anointment follows: *Signo te signo Crucis* . . . and the thumb dipped in holy chrism makes the sign of the cross on the small brow, and the venerable voice proclaiming *pax tecum* confirms the small soul in the fellowship of Christ . . . and this is Peppi Ganner to be so honoured, and Peppi is a man now amongst the men of Midrans. And this is Hugo Harpf. . . .

Now, there is no doubt at all (for I heard the story confirmed later in Schlamms itself and by a young man in Sterzing, now called Vipiteno, who had been confirmed that same day), there is no doubt that Hans came squawking into the church during some stage of the ceremony. Hugo had forgotten him that day, but Hansl had not forgotten Hugo. Whether he lay low in one of the carts that came down from Midrans, or flew from fringe to fringe of the woods as the carts descended into the Schlammsthal, is not known. There seems more than an element of deliberately heightened drama in the general account that it

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was precisely at the moment of the bishop's anointment that Hans tumbled down upon Hugo's shoulder, once more neglecting Peppi Ganner, a foot or two away from him, as he had done long ago. But whether chance directed this too appropriate moment for the harsh reassertion by Hans of his claim or whether it occurred a little earlier or later, it was a moment of such horror for the mother of Hugo Harpf that it never deserted her eyes, even when the light was gone from them and they were dead disks in the twilight. The horror never again went out of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

HANSL being accepted for better and for worse, the tale of Hugo during his boyhood and early youth presents no striking features, and to deal with it in detail would be no more than to attempt a picture of the young peasant in the sequestered valleys of Tirol. Franzl, the eldest brother, devoted himself to the four or five head of cattle and the dozen and a half of goats which were the not insubstantial property of old Harpf during the years that preceded the war, his most prosperous. Alois, the next brother, became a wood-cutter on the state preserves near Schlamms and a poacher of some esteem. Erich, the brother next below Hugo, was apprenticed to Wildhauer, the miller. Ludl assisted Franzl in the care of the goats. For Johann, Seppl, Lorenz, for the whole succession of brothers as they were born and attained any power of hand and foot, there was work enough to do. Hugo it was who showed special facility in old Harpf's main occupation, fine painting or gross painting, whatever came to hand. Orders came to them from villages half a day distant, beyond deep ravines and stony passes, for the painting of saints on house-walls, the wreathing of painted vines over inn-doorways, the execution of florid Gothic mottos withindoors, between trophies of stuffed blackcock and chamois heads. Hugo himself quite early attained a special reputation for the painting of those votive tablets erected upon precipitous pathways or the edge of forests, recording here a disaster to some hapless

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cowherd, there the accident which had pulped some wood-cutter's body. He seems to have painted with especial vigour the complex tortures of hell, which frequently, and it might be thought unsuitably, accompany the request from the passing stranger of a Pater Noster or two, and an Ave Maria, for the ease of the dead man's soul.

He was a youth, like the rest of his family, of great strength, and a fine marksman. At the shooting-matches upon feast-days, when he was hardly more than fifteen years old he held his own with almost anyone in the village — Father Josef himself being one of his closest rivals. Father Josef, it might be stated, is not especially famous for his austerity in these years that precede the first miracle-working of Hugo. It was only later, when it seemed that if he did not rise in the fullest wrath of his church to declare anathema upon this black mystery which threatened his valley, whether sprung from the loins of unextinguished idols or some demon newly liberated from hell — it was only later that he became a creature of awe and terror, the priest I myself encountered and unwisely questioned and by whom I was so summarily dismissed. Indeed, it might have been gathered from the hints and sneers of Hugo's men that his career previous to his exile in this remote valley was not immune from scandal. There were unsavoury whispers coupling his name with his own housekeeper's in the village he had come from; there was also talk of an unhappy peasant-girl who threw herself into a tarn — but I did not allow myself to fall a victim to these insinuations, as was intended. It was Hugo's men who whispered them. I certainly saw him drink measure for measure in the Herrenzimmer with the most redoubtable drinkers among the gentry of Midrans. But there is no sort of ratio between

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drink and piety in these regions; and in point of fact, whereas even the Burgermeister, a calm and silent man, became at length clamorous with the amount of harsh wine he had swallowed, Father Josef became more and more reserved and forbidding. Only his single eye shone, with a wildness I did not dare to contemplate.

Hugo, as I have said, was an admirable marksman, and at the shooting-matches of more than one village down in the Schlammsthal he hit the bull's-eye or the heart of the running-stag so surely that Nanni Tratzl, standing bright-eyed beside his shoulder, brought away with her at the day's end many a fringed silken kerchief to set upon her shoulders or about her thick brown hair.

By the time that Hugo was sixteen, it was apparently generally understood that he and Nanni were one day to wed. Her father was an avaricious peasant of some substance, who lived in an inn which a hundred years ago had dared to set itself up to challenge the supremacy of the White Lamb. For that long-dead Tratzl had argued with justice that there were villages in other valleys not so large as Midrans which supported riotously three inns or four, and there was no reason why a Golden Eagle, for instance, or a Wild Man, should not supplement a White Lamb. An earlier Harpf was duly called in to whitewash and adorn the new inn. But the Wild Man he painted for an inn sign had swung his club to no purpose for ninety years, leaving the White Lamb to tread from decade to decade, delicate and unchallenged, upon his airy flowers. Old Tratzl had died broken-hearted and heavy with debt, transmitting to his sons and grandsons a duty of working hard and living low, in order that the fortunes of their family might be retrieved. By a natural process, a tradition of avarice settled upon the family, and no Tratzl

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would not walk five hours to economize two farthings or would retain for a wife in labour a thimbleful of cow's milk while milk still issued from the udders of goats.

One is not surprised that at length little Nanni rose in revolt against the mean living of a century and placed herself by the side of an earlier Tratzl who, vowing that Midrans was not gay enough, established a new inn and a long debt. A pagan little creature was Nanni in those early days, with the wealth of bright ribbons she flaunted in her dark hair and the way she managed to steal out of her mother's huge chest in the attic her gayest kerchiefs and fold them about her own small shoulders as she came tripping down to the well in front of the White Lamb, with that old he-goat behind her who looked after her as faithfully as any hound. Hugo and his raven, Nanni and her he-goat, they present an image out of an earlier order of imagery than the Christian, as they stand together in the village square, declaring before the world that her soft lips are for the youth's firm mouth and her proud little head for his broad shoulder. To me, as I re-create the picture, they stiffen suddenly, they become a panel out of some pagan burial-place, a funeral stele over young love destined to no triumph.

It was in honour of no especial saint, her own or Hugo's or anyone's, that Nanni decked herself out in gaudy fittings. You might as well suggest that it was to honour a saint she rammed her small fist into her mother's preserve of fruit, or like any boy shinned up Father Josef's cherry-tree, embowered as it was in its own sacred seclusion. Well might Sister Teresa wag her head doubtfully, when Nanni curtseyed towards her with a dimple of mockery in her cheek. Or when Hugo strode off up the mountain with Nanni keeping firm pace beside him, well might Father

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Josef cram his nose full of snuff and stare after them darkly. A raven, a raven and a he-goat! Herr Gott, what companionship!

The priest might or might not stare after them, with less or more distrust in his eyes, according to the truth of the reports regarding his early years mumbled among the peasants. The father of Nanni Tratzl seemed less anxious. There was not a coin he valued more than his girl, among the silver and gold pieces tied up in a stocking and thrust away at the bottom of the huge chest of grain under the rafters. But he was not anxious about Nanni. He did not mistrust Hugo. He had himself fought lustily for the possession of Nanni's mother, a woman considerably younger than himself, and he was pleasantly aware that Hugo had not assumed such overt rights of dancing with Nanni upon feast-days or bringing her bunches of alpine primroses to set in her shawl, without some screwing up of rival eyes and breaking of rival noses. Pleasantly aware of Hugo old Tratzl might be, but he did not permit himself to communicate the pleasantness to the youth. That was not the way of the Tratzls. What would the Harpfs be thinking? That he intended to dower his daughter with a herd of cows to be her portion and three haystacks? Pooh! "Greet God!" he grunted, when Hugo put in an appearance. "Greet God!" replied Hugo. That was about as far as the conversation went. Hugo sat drumming his bare knees with his fingers. Nanni sat knitting and blushing. Frau Tratzl was in the kitchen, peeling potatoes as fine as rose-petals, thinking her own thoughts, if she had any.

"Greet God!" stammered Hugo some hours later, reaching for his hat.

"Greet God!" replied old Tratzl grumpily. He had seen the youth enter the stores in Schlamms two days ago

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and buy some tobacco. It hadn't occurred to him to hand the packet over to his prospective, or at least possible, father-in-law. He would have to fill up with his own tobacco. "*Hurensknochen!*" he growled under his breath. "Whore's bones!" Then aloud: "Maiden, hand me my pipe!"

But she was not there. She had crept out like a mouse and run after her lover like a hare.

"*Sacrament!*" blustered old Tratzl and walked over to the cupboard where he kept his pipe and tobacco. His joints creaked. He sat down again. It would be more economical to defer his pipe till to-morrow midday. Or to-morrow night perhaps. Pig. Bull-calf. Goats. Gold pieces. More gold pieces. More gold pieces. That was the tenor of his reflections. As for Hugo and Nanni, the youth was too much of a fool to worry about, and she too shy. Shyer than her mother anyhow. She wouldn't give anything away before she knew just what she was getting. The mother hadn't much left to give by the time he churched her. He grimaced wryly. He might have made a better bargain of it. Gretl, for instance, one of the Wildhauer daughters, who would have brought along a whole granary of white flour. Well! that was an old grief. The sting was out of it, and though she had not been much of a companion, she might have been a worse wife. She knew how to make food cost less, taste better and last longer than any woman in Midrans.

Hugo was too much of a fool. . . .

But in point of fact old Tratzl knew that was not why his heart was at ease. There was a sort of ingenuous purity about the lad with the pale-blue eyes, a lad who could take his drink with the next man, play the crooked-finger game with that same next man and have him on the floor in forty

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seconds — yet a lad, withal, who did not go lurching off into the woods with his girl, like most of the young fellows so soon as he had a pint of wine inside him. A youth like an apple. No, Nanni was the apple. Say a turnip. Or a carrot perhaps, with that pale hair. Or would you say parsnip?

Old Tratzl did not invent for the bleached hair of Hugo any of those erotic similitudes which the neurotic lady and gentleman from Budapest were some half-year later to elaborate — Oskar Tachezy, I mean, and his wife. But before I allow them to divert this tale into the channel that breaks at so grotesque an angle from its early courses, I must not fail to present the lad and the maiden, enjoying the utmost happiness that was appointed them, in that remote alp some thousands of feet above Midrans, whither Nanni Tratzl rose to pasture her father's cattle in May, when the high meadows were as gaily patterned as her own gayest shawl and the milk of her father's cows was as white as her own skin where the sun did not strike it, and the cheese she made in her great cauldron was odorous as her own lips to her young lover.

It was natural that old Tratzl should decide he could not afford to send any other maiden than his daughter to tend his cattle during the lonely summer months. His only daughter she might be, but he had to clothe and feed her in any case; so what was the point of giving away to a stranger at the end of the season a length of cloth and a pair of boots, not to mention some real money, several shillings she might insist on?

But Nanni did not find those months quite so lonely as they might have been, even if her work had given her a moment's time to be lonely in. There was the alp-hut to

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keep clean, the cattle to pasture, making sure they did not wander into dangerous places. There was butter to churn and cheese to make in that vast witch's cauldron in which three or four Nanni Tratzls might have curled up and gone to sleep. There was hardly time upon week-days, and not much more on Sundays, to pine after the somewhat dour amenities of Midrans. If there was — what was old Docksel, her he-goat, doing up here, to leave his mistress moping? He would place his forelegs upon her shoulders like some great hound and look into her eyes steadily out of his own great inscrutable eyes, that seemed to belong to a race of creatures earlier in geologic time than these frail bipeds who bestrode the rocks so contemptibly and filled their stomachs with such nauseous brews, eschewing all the tart delights of juicy grass and sprouting leaves. She, for her part, would pull his beard and tug his horns and decide that though his nose was short and coarse and his voice was no nightingale's, there were young men in Midrans whose noses were less lovely and smell less appetizing.

But should these same delights of grass and leaves divert Docksel from the care of his mistress, was not now work over in the valley, this being the noon of Saturday; and was not even now the yellow-haired lover, Hugo, painter of saints and devils, was he not setting off at this moment from Midrans through the thick belt of pines; into the middle meadows, into the higher and sparser woods? Was he not now, bronze knee setting manfully before bronze knee, crossing the Joch, that scoop of loose rubble where in the thawing-time the avalanches hurtled down that abrupt road they had shovelled for themselves during innumerable years? What? Had Hugo slipped? Was he bringing down with him, down and down, a *débris*

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of knife-like flints and skull-like boulders? Was that Hugo who hurtled dead as these towards the lower lands?

Never fear, Nanni! Nor does she fear. No feet steadier than Hugo's among powdery gravel or slippery screes. He has attained that region of melancholy rocks where the wind howls forlornly even upon quiet summer days, a bitter region with a curse upon it. A narrow ravine bisected it, which the heftier lads and men, and not all of these, took in a vast flying leap, easily enough on the downward path, with the impetus of descent to help you bridge the arc of air, but difficult and dangerous as you ascended. But it saved you an hour, if you managed it, of side-tracking athwart a less mournful region.

There is, however, no ravine within the compass of a stalwart lad's leap which is so broad that Hugo will not bridge it, if Nanni is the further pier of the arc. And no region of rocks is bitter, nor has a curse upon it, if a green meadow is at its summit and an alp-hut is at the heart of the meadow, and a brown-eyed girl is at the door of the hut, with apples ripe in her cheeks before the season of apples, and ripening apples for her bosom.

So steep is the last gradient that precedes old Tratzl's alp if you approach it thus frontally, that though the mountain still has thousands of feet to climb until its final rocks splinter against vacancy, this last gradient seems to Hugo climbing the very top of things, and the creature outlined upon its edge the sovereign of all that vastness. Docksel it is, sculptured in stone. Only when suddenly Hansl frees his claws from the shoulder-strap of Hugo's rucksack and beats his way upward (and with surprising grace, as if the rare atmosphere compelled him to æsthetic performance), only then does Docksel unstiffen from his shaggy neck to the taut muscles of his thighs. His bell

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clangs urgently as he speeds towards Nanni, crying, making a commotion among all her beasts; as it were a bell in a belfry calling two young celebrants to celebrate a mass not less mystical, but less terrifying, than the mass performed by Father Josef in his more confined sanctuary.

The youth approaches it in no sanctimonious spirit, yo-



deling furiously. She is seated upon a wooden trestle roughly knocked together out of a few sticks and a segment of rough pines. She keeps her head coyly averted, pretending no charnel-vault is quieter and emptier than her meadow. But the cows and the goats, the dog, the raven, will have nothing of such pretences. There is a mooing, a whinnying, a croaking, a barking, a clamour of water among pebbles, of breezes among tree-tops. He is

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ten yards away from her, a yard away. He catches her like a toy from her trestle, efficient, canny, vain little toy that she is.

"Holla!" his lips full upon hers.

"Du?" she inquires, as if precisely at that moment she had arrived at the conclusion that Hugo Harpf was tying the Archduke's cravat for him over in his palace in Vienna.

"No! Not me! The Archangel Gabriel!"

Her fingers were playing fealty among the crisp yellow hair at the back of his head, as if it were a zither.

"I thought thou wouldst never come!" she said reproachfully.

"How then! I promised to let old Frau Huber — no, not the one of Midrans. I mean her husband's sister-in-law: the other one from Wilding, down the valley — I promised to let her have the tablet for her son to-day — Peppi, who was drowned a year ago, when he slipped into the stream dead-drunk ——"

"Enough, enough, of thy tales! What hast thou brought for me to-day? Come in! Open!"

She dragged him behind her into the hut and pulled the straps off his shoulders excitedly.

"Wait! Wait!" he promised. "Thou shalt see!"

He had brought flour and lentils for herself. These did not excite her. And salt for the cattle. That interested her more. There were still three days to go by before Tall Toni, the zany, appeared with their fortnightly ration. Here was a cake. Frau Harpf had made it. The girl clapped her hands. And then in a sticky bag, all clotted together, a lump of sugary sweets. "*Krucitürken!*" she exclaimed broadly. "Maria, mother of God!"

Each filled his cheek with a soggy mass and left the lentils and the flour on the table, to look after themselves.

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They placed themselves on the trestle before the door and looked out over the enormous world. Her hand sought his. He brought his further hand over to hold it upon his thigh. The nearer arm crept behind and round her waist, till he supported her like a swathe of corn or a great armful of flowers. They sucked the sweets, blissfully, contemplatively, saying not a word.

They were no more than children, for all her craft among cheeses and all his strong limbs and steady eyes. She leaned her head upon his shoulders, as the shadows strode swiftly up the darkening slopes.

"Thou!" she whispered.

"Thou!" was all his reply.

There was no need for any more copious eloquence. She and he among the tops of the mountains. The taste of the sugar on her lips was sweet upon his own also.

"A little more *Zuckerl!*" she begged.

"Another kiss first!" he commanded.

"So!"

"Ah!"

"But there is no sun now!"

"Come then, Nanni, light the lamp. I will make the fire for the Schmarren!"

"Docksel must go into the shed first! Docksel, where art thou? Docksel!" He lay at her feet, contentedly, like a dog. "Come!" she pulled him up by his beard and took him to his place. "And Hansl?" she asked. Hansl knew his place too. He was perched on the soot-coated bar of the crane from which the cheese-cauldron was suspended. "Caw!" he cried. "Enough, enough, children! Enough of this childishness! A man wants his supper! Here's the butter, here's the water in the pail! Look out, Hugo! Clumsy! You'll knock the bag of flour over with your big coarse

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hand! Talking about hands — look at Nanni's! I ask *you*, Nanni Tratzl! He's going to make a Schmarren without salt!"

Nanni looked on indulgently, while the fire of fresh wood crackled and spat. "A pity," grumbled the raven, "there's no making a Schmarren without a fire!" But he only transferred himself from his perch when the smoke threatened to stifle him. The stew was simmering fragrantly now in the well-scoured frying-pan, now it was simmering less fragrantly.

"Dunderhead!" cried Nanni sternly, "thou'rt letting it stick!" She took the stirring-spoon out of his hand. He hung his head meekly. She stirred the mountainy mass briskly, shook the pan, stirred again. The light glinted like sunrays among chestnuts in her thick plaited hair. "Now," she cried triumphantly. "Now!" echoed Hansl. "There'll be no Schmarren," said Hugo, "more *appetitlich* in all Midrans to-night!"

"And none bigger," said Nanni slyly, "for any family of ten!"

They set themselves round the table, all three of them, the youth and the girl and the raven. "Hot! Hot!" complained Hansl. "Don't be greedy!" cried Nanni. "Here's a lump of bacon!" said Hugo, extracting it from a forgotten corner of his rucksack, which hung at arm's length away from him on a peg. "A lump of bacon to eat while the Schmarren cools!"

"Here's a crumb of white bread," said Nanni, "to go with thy bacon!"

"And nothing for me?" asked Hans the raven.

"Wait!"

They devoured their Schmarren, slowly, appreciatively. The white bread was fragrant upon their palates as a

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queen's pastry. He was still eating slowly, appreciatively, an hour after Nanni had finished. Hansl clutched the edge of the table and threw his head back as far as it would go. He kept pace with his master. He had accumulated his own private store, and was demolishing it morsel by morsel at pious intervals according to some strange order of precedence.

"Wine!" he cawed. "Wine! Or a cup of tea perhaps? With rum!"

"Greedy!" said Nanni. "Thou canst wait too!"

But it was worth waiting for, so choice a liquor as this was, to which the rarest plants of the mountains had yielded their essences. Cherry was it? Gentian was it? Whatever the main substance was, the flavour was subtler than words.

"Witch!" he called her.

"But let not," she whispered fearfully, "let not my father know!"

"I will!" he vowed. "I will! There is only one way to shut my lips!"

She shut them for him, again and yet again.

"Nobody thinks of me!" mourned Hansl.

Hugo did not move his lips from hers. Very gently, he reached his glass along the table and poured out three drops carefully before the scaly jet of the bird's feet.

"Thou!" murmured Hugo, his lips always on hers.

"Thou!" she breathed.

"Once again only, my pretty!"

Once again only, for they were both to get up before dawn next day, even though it was Sunday; the cows must still be milked and the shed cleaned, and the sooner they got the work over between them, the more time they would have together before Hugo must set off again down the

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mountain to Midrans. So that not many minutes later, here is Nanni settling down upon the straw palliasse on her trestle-bed, away in the gabled loft over the dairy. She has fingered her rosary and uttered a prayer or two; but the smile on her dimpled cheek, which sleep does not wipe out, and awakening does no more than add a dimple to, that smile is not for the Man of Sorrows hung on his cross in the corner over her bed, nor for the sad lady who bore him. It is for the lad with the pale hair that flares faintly even now as he crosses the meadow under a roof of clear stars. He has reached the small log-hut now, in which old Tratzl stores the hay yielded by this high pasture. Now he has crawled through the narrow aperture at the base of the hut and now he spreads the sweet hay under him for his bed. A moment or two later, like the girl in the house, he too is asleep with a smile upon his lips.

They are no more than children sleeping, for whom there is no lust in the flesh and there are no mysteries in the spirit. They are lifted high above Midrans, as upon a platform. The mountain flowers will not be gayer than she is, nor the mountain stream more candid than her lover. But who knows between what sunless walls and over what viewless bed that same water will pass at length?

Leave them in their innocence upon their palliasse of straw and couch of hay. Leave them. And oh, dark raven, do not flap your wings so unquietly under the beams!

CHAPTER SIX

I

I HAVE not talked of a raven, of whom Hansl would be no unfitting symbol, who, for a year and two years now, has flapped his wings under the roof-beams of a vaster house than that where we have left young Hugo sleeping. No, I must have for the wings of this bird the span of an eagle's wings; he must have the claws and the beak of a vulture, and he must nibble in subterranean places with small sharp teeth like a rat.

But the flapping of this great bird's wings are not heard in Midrans, though the whole world else is deafened by it. It is as if the rumours of armies reeling in France, in Russia, on the marches of Italy, is muffled by the hanging tapestries of pine-woods. Even Schlamms down the Floriansthal has become as brisk as a perpetual market day. Innsbruck, whither few of the villagers of Midrans are wont to penetrate, now as ever (excepting those who must in their turn) is a rumble, all the twenty-four hours, of guns and feet. But the immediate noise of the Sturmbach and the encompassing noise of the woods still dominate the air of Midrans. It is as if the natural elements, which subdue all flesh in Midrans into their pattern and quality, had a consciousness of old wars that had been and new wars that must be again; of Etruscans flung back and conquerors at length, but conquerors only of the lesser breed that preceded them in these pastures, not conquerors

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of these elements — water and wind and woods. As if they remembered Rhætians and Romans, blond men and swarthy men, invaders from Scythian and Atlantic beaches. All those tumults are over; and these tumults of Austrians and Italians, Germans and Englishmen, will have their day. But there is no such impermanent tumult in Midrans, with her further portal sealed by the cold kiss of the glacier and the hither portal towards the valley and the world blocked by the tumble of rocks whereon the castle of the Felsenburg stands.

Not that Midrans has not gone forth to war. That would be a foolish calumny, and I could tell tales of valour among Midrans men which would seem to be tales not so much of men as of demons or half-gods. But these words indicate precisely the spirit in which they went forth, or rather the spirit in which their going forth was viewed by the women and the old men and the lads who stayed behind. It was into a world of enchantment they disappeared, some never to come again, others to come maimed and blinded. It was in just the same way they had viewed the absences of the youth of Midrans upon their compulsory service before the war under less ominous auspices. It was into unreality the young men disappeared from their ancestral tilth and pasture; so they themselves regarded it no less than their fathers who had served before them and the women who waited. It was into the only reality that had any meaning for them they returned. They returned without swagger, as the young men did not who lived in less sequestered villages or in more populous valleys. Their service might have taken them into barracks in large cities like Graz or Klagenfurt, but they sloughed off the contact as unostentatiously as possible. They did not presume to inform their women who smoked pipes that women in Salzburg did not.

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Their few pence of payment had permitted them few urban luxuries, but they did not seek to impose these upon Midrans. The fantasy was over. They gave themselves once more to their goats and hogs, their seeds and roots. So they felt of this more imperious disturbance — that summoned them from their cowsheds as it summoned other poor men from their mines and their looms — they felt not that it was less fantastic, but merely more malefic.

Indeed, in their own community, from season to season of the year, there were certain ones who afforded them instances of just such uprootings, identical in quality, it seemed to them all. One, old Julia, was sane; the others were mad, village zanies they were, Trottels. Julia was one of the oldest of the old beldames of Midrans. She was the Anzägerin, the announcer of deaths, the carrier of candles at funerals, the watcher by corpses in the chapel in the cemetery — a cadaverous lady who survived my own sojourn in Midrans, and seemed not less a corpse than any she washed and laid out in its cerements. How long the habit possessed her was not known: but no one remembered the time when the habit did not possess her of disappearing out of Midrans, sometimes for two whole days and nights, sometimes even for three. She would betake herself to some remote shrine or chapel, it was said, and spend all those hours upon her knees, without any movement at all, except for the slow regular clicking of the beads in her rosary between her bony fingers. It was a motion as regular and remorseless as the mechanical revolution of a leather band in a machine, slowed down by some demented engineer, almost to immobility. It was said she betook herself to this shrine or this votive tablet, though it had been set up in some difficult place which a

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young woman might not have reached without difficulty. Just as often it was denied. Some poacher under his breath, or some wood-cutter with more freedom, asserted that the thing they had taken for the kneeling body of old Julia was no more than the odd shadow made by a passing cloud against the moon. Or it was a shadow cast though there was no moon at all, or no cloud. The thing certainly was not Julia.

And yet the time of enchantment coming to an end, that night or the next morning Julia was in her place again, in the hovel she occupied not far from the house of old Tratzl, or on her knees at the four o'clock mass. Father Josef, like the priest who had preceded him, had not asked her more than once or twice why she had not been at the mass the day before. And he refrained not because she lied, saying that she had, in point of fact, *not* missed the mass; but because he was afraid that, in some awful way he dared not contemplate, she told the truth.

Nor was it any the less curious that, whether or not she attended mass, whether or not she attended some other solemnity, her disappearances never cut in upon her professional duties. She had the nose for death. Sometimes a man might meet her coming out of the woods with an armful of faggots, after an absence of no more than six or nine hours. Her few strands of thin hair were disordered, there was a phantom flush upon the sallow parchment of her cheeks. Where had she been, he might ask her, his heart short with dread. Where? Where? And yet what were these sticks for, if not to boil her Kraut that night? None the less a dew stood on his forehead. He knew death was upon Midrans. Would death go on to his neighbour's door, or enter by his own? For whom was this visitation? His wife, his son, himself?

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But whatsoever thing she might be in the bearded, the silent woods, and what strange communion she might make in the places where a cowherd had fallen and his bones been smashed, or a wood-cutter pinned under a blasted tree, in Midrans she was not more than Julia, the Anzägerin, an official in her degree like Steffel, the sexton, or Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster. Her duties were not strictly defined, any more than theirs were, for the schoolmaster was not less a veterinary surgeon, and the sexton was anything at all. But in Midrans she had her duty. Fantasy lay beyond.

The duties of the village zanies, and Midrans had more than its share of them, small community though it was, were even less definite. Tall Toni was the most amiable of them, and the most unfortunate; he was destined to play a principal part in the tragedy of Hugo Harpf. His too scrupulous performance prevented me, for my part, from making his acquaintance. He was not in Midrans when I arrived. Some said he was in the great Narren-Haus, the asylum, at Hall; some that he was in prison; others that he was dead. Conrad von Felsenburg, perhaps, has more accurate information; but he has not vouchsafed it me.

It is not difficult to build up his lineaments from the specimens of Trottel that survived in Midrans. His rival in ecstasy was a shambling youth called Fritz; but I am disposed to corroborate the feeling current in certain quarters that Fritz was a fake. There is no doubt that Toni was not. Tall Toni, like Fritz, and the others, had no second name. They were not all the offspring of some black moment's passion in the woods, some night when Midrans had made itself more than usually furious with strife and drink. But mostly they were — the few you might meet in Midrans and the others down the dale or up in the branching

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gullies. They slept like swine in the stalls and laboured for their crust of bread like blinkered horses in a mill. Their fathers were not known or there was so much doubt as between a dozen competitors that the doubt was not decided. Or the man married the miserable wench at length, but repudiated the mindless hulk she had given birth to as completely as he dared. As for Toni, no man repudiated him, for none claimed him. His mother died in the field where she had given him birth. As the lad grew, no one quite knowing how, for it was no one's business at all, he was allowed to do any odd job in the village, from cutting down a tree that had grown to be dangerous to tending a herd when the boy or girl who usually tended it was sick. But there was such a *naïveté* about him and he answered so comically when he was spoken to — with no conscious comedy, of course — that he set the good people at the White Lamb howling with laughter. He looked a little hurt when they laughed at him, and opened his wide eyes wider, but that only amused them the more.

“Another quarter!” they would cry to the Fräulein. “Another quarter of a litre! Tall Toni's in good trim to-night!”

The small boys threw stones at him; but how could they be expected not to, when he wore a coat that trailed behind him on to the floor and his sleeves had been cut short above the knobbly elbow? The small girls joined hands and made a ring about him, as they did about Sister Teresa; but he did not join in the game, as the Sister did. He put his head upon his knees and sobbed.

Quite early, though nearly half a century separated him from old Julia, he learned a trick from her. He, too, disappeared into the woods, but there was no pretence of gathering faggots or mushrooms. He disappeared when he

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had eaten very well and was happy, or was hungry and was miserable; or the boys and girls had become more than he could bear. He was often heard singing snatches of old Tirolese ditties of love and hunting, though anyone less like a lover or a huntsman was outside the imaginations of Midrans. This solace helped him through his boyhood. He was quite a young man and should have known better when he burst into the Bauernstube at the White Lamb one night, with his teeth chattering and his fingers frantically making the sign of the Cross. His eyeballs stood out of his head. "Devils!" he shrieked; then he put his fingers to his mouth and checked any further language. He looked round as if his utterance had brought them on him again. He sprang across to the holy-water stoup by the door and blessed himself. Then the shuddering ceased. There was a great scratch the length of his cheek and the skin of his knuckles was broken with gravel.

"Say then!" cried the others. "What was there? What hast thou seen?"

But they could get nothing from him, however liberally they poured Schnapps down his throat. It was generally imagined that he had met some poacher from another valley who, finding that he had nothing more formidable than a Trottel to deal with, had already let him have more Schnapps than he could hold. In Midrans itself he met none of *them* — he would not refer to them more specifically — under the shadow of St. Florian's tall green spire. He went back into the woods again and for some months did not renew their acquaintance. But he did at length. This time it was into a Benediction service that he hurled himself whimpering. His hair stood on his head. His lips were black with the blood he had bitten from them. They had had him again.

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That night in the White Lamb they began to see the humorous side of it. Toni was obviously going to be worth his keep. His descriptions were not much more circumstantial that night than they had been earlier; but a month or two later he vouchsafed them more details. Nobody, not even the scoffers, the liberals, permitted themselves to speak of *them* excepting as Toni himself referred to them. But their lineaments became clearer, so far as the phosphorescent darkness — a state of the atmosphere more illusive than pitchy night itself — permitted Toni to report of them. Had Toni been the fine intelligence and the consummate actor which he was not (and which his rival Fritz without much success attempted to be) he need have gone no further into the realms of wizardry than any tablet painted by Hugo Harpf or Franz Harpf or any earlier Harpf, presenting the lords of Hell and their human prizes. Precisely there were all Toni's pot-bellies and beaks for noses and curly tails and toads for heads. But Toni's colours were more vivid than Franz Harpf's and without a trace of professional jealousy the painter and his son impelled Toni to further portraiture. Those were great evenings in the Bauernstube at the White Lamb and the laughter was all the more uproarious because a certain fear underlay it. Toni's own moods on those evenings alternated between a gibbering terror due to the vividness of his re-creations and a sudden proud realization of the position he occupied at the centre of things. With a sweat of terror still on his forehead, he would bang his stick on the floor as if it were a sceptre, and order a fresh glass of Schnapps to ease his narrative faculties.

There were a few humourless people who suggested that he should not venture into the further woods again — at night, at least, and alone. But Toni was slave and not

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master. Three months later, or three nights later, he was banging once more at the door, if some peasant's carcase happened for the moment to be blocking it; and once more, with his face and hands torn, and his eyes staring, he thrust himself into the shelter of the heart of Midrans, the sardonic but at least human heart of Midrans, leaving enchantment beyond the further limits, suspended in the beards of primeval pines and stewing in the bellies of black caves.

2

In the church of St. Florian and in the White Lamb and in the homesteads of Midrans, the war which now convulsed the outer world, far beyond the last fringes of the woods and the last crevasse of the glaciers, seemed an enchantment precisely of that nature. The enchantment had infinitely extended its scope, assuming under its sway not merely old women and idiots, but every able-bodied and able-minded man. And when certain of these from time to time returned from various theatres of the war, their smashed faces and broken limbs were of the nature of the wounds Tall Toni brought with him from his contacts in the woods. *They*, it was felt, were responsible for these also. The war and all its complex devilry were outside of Midrans, excluded. The handful of service men who from time to time managed to crawl home into Midrans and were not required to return, did not discuss what they had been through either amongst themselves or amongst those who had stayed. It belonged to the unreal world. The talk was of old Prandl's steer and the prices they could get for milk and cheese. They were conscious of townsmen gaping for a sack of rotten potatoes or a load of swedes to make

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bread with. But Midrans kept itself to itself. There was not more plenty in Midrans than before, in that place of rocky acres and thin pastures; but it was known that they lived like dukes compared with the wizened people in cities. The war did not enter into Midrans, nor did Midrans go forth into the war—only the reserves as they were called up and the young men in their classes. They entered into enchantment and left Midrans behind them, and came back again, or did not come.

Hugo's eldest brother, Franzl, had already gone. The second brother, Alois, would be going shortly. There was still time enough before Hugo's class would be called on. Like the rest of the men who were beyond or under the age, Hugo did his work as before. There was, perhaps, more to do now, for Franzl had arms and shoulders like three men and his work devolved on the others. But it was the same work and there were the same rewards—a jug of wine at the inn and the lips of Nanni in her hut.

It was only the gallant captain of infantry, Oskar Tachezy, who introduced the sense of the war into Midrans not as a thing of remote magic but as a disturbance, an irritation, as something that made the smell of oxen less real and the smell of high explosive more real—Oskar Tachezy of the high-pitched voice and the small feet and the quick neurotic hands, Oskar Tachezy of the great world, the cosmopolite, of Budapest, Paris, Munich, the dynamist, the futurist, the passéist. . . .

I cannot begin to describe Tachezy without immediately indicating the fantastic paradox he was. The more I become acquainted with the polite classes of his race, the more I tend to think that by stating quite simply that he

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was a Hungarian, I indicate the whole man in his general relation with Europe and his particular relation with Midrans and the Harpf family. He was an officer in the regular army, and there never was a man so full of sudden stiff punctilios, so prompt to lightning standings upon his dignity. He wore civilian costume in Midrans, for the idea of the medical officers was to keep any memory of the war as completely out of his mind as possible. They had chosen Midrans to be the scene of his convalescence with a degree of intelligence not common in that body during the first stages of the war; but that was, I suppose, not because they had heard of the place, but because they had not. Tachezy wore civilian costume, I repeat, but you never knew when his hand would not dart to his hip as if to drag from its scabbard the sword of an officer, and a Hungarian. He was every inch a soldier, almost a picture-post-card soldier, so that his heroism at the front was of the same ideal pattern as his exquisite gallantry behind the lines. But he was not merely every inch a soldier; he was to the last refinement an æsthete, from the fastidious Gothic archways of his finger-nails to the scrupulous grooming of each hair in his eyebrows. I take it that so notable a gentleman ought to have attained a more brilliant rank than captaincy; and it seems there might have been no limit to his promotions if he could have kept distinct the two aspects of his personality. But a soldier, or an officer at least, who is quite capable of forgetting the very meaning of such terms as percussion-fuses, gun-carriages, muzzle velocity, in the rabid excitement caused in him by the news of a new theory of painting propounded in Moscow or Catalonia; and, at the same time, a painter who suddenly finds himself impelled to paint a canvas in terms of shock tactics, ambush, flanking movements, general

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strategy — such an officer, such a painter, is not likely to achieve conspicuous success in either of those very special undertakings.

The name, therefore, of Oskar Tachezy is not emblazoned in the contemporary annals of war and art. But to each he devoted himself not merely with piety but with a zeal as shrill and intense as a gas-jet. Just as there was no excitement in pre-war painting which he did not indulge in and practise, so there was no front where he did not perform prodigies of valour. And just as, with Schmidt-Rottluff he impressed on Germanic canvases the sweaty hulk of jungle negroes and with Carlo Carra he stated with more than Italian volubility everything that constitutes, and is contained by, an ink-bottle — so he proceeded to the storming of Serbia, the engulfment in marshes of a myriad Russians, and the extermination of sallow hordes of “Welschers” along the whole Italian front. My informants had no clear knowledge as to the whereabouts of Serbia and of Russia, so that their details of Tachezy’s achievements in those regions were vague. I can conceive that his own frantic orations were not miracles of lucidity for the lumbering intelligences of Midrans. But more details were to hand regarding his feats in Sud-Tirol, the map of which country was not wholly unfamiliar to them; for, from time to time, in seasons of scanty harvest, one Midranser or another might set off into those regions to peddle his rucksack crammed with carved Christs. Tachezy had fought on the Col di Lana, in the Stilfserjoch, on the Rotwand, at Cimone, Pasubio, Roteck, and the mountain grimly miscalled Piano. In fact, if the mere historical annals are to be trusted, he fought in some of these places simultaneously. Certain episodes emerged, all characterized by a sort of copy-book gallantry; the sort of gallantry

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that is inscribed by female chroniclers in copperplate in Books of Golden Deeds. There was a story of a gang of Russian prisoners who were employed by headquarters to carry provisions to some precariously advanced unit in the Wildgrabenjoch in the Sexten sector; of their mute hunger and misery, and how Tachezy induced his men to hand over to them, and himself handed over, in exchange for their scanty and verminous bread, the stock of sardines and chocolate which the Alpinists were allowed as an especial winter ration. One of the prisoners, he incidentally discovered, had painted with Stelletsky in Petersburg, and the argument in which the fervent captain promptly engaged the prisoner, with respect to the validity in a creative art of archaic research, almost lost to the army of the Central Powers the services of Oskar Tachezy and his detachment. It was only a piece of the most frantic personal daring on the part of the captain himself, recalled to a sense of reality by the sudden annihilation of his partner in the argument, that saved the position. Another story concerned the section beyond Rovereto, where the road climbed to the advanced posts by way of Piazza and Geroli. An avalanche had precipitated itself upon an outwork within range of the enemy's artillery on the opposite slopes. It was an avalanche of that more formidable type called the Grundlawine, the type which involves not merely the surface snow of the less desperate midwinter Staublawine, but the clots of ice and earth and rock which the later thaws loosen. The avalanche had entombed a body of Landsturmlaute; so much was clear. How many the snow itself had suffocated and how many the collapsed timber of the outwork had smashed to pulp, could not off-hand be decided. But one thing seemed certain, that if any still survived, they would not long outlast the somewhat

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derisory and very accurate shell-fire with which the enemy, whose eyes nothing could escape in that particular sector, were flattering the situation. It was the sort of issue that called for volunteers, not merely because the enemy had at that point so vast an advantage both in position and numbers, but because it seemed mere murder to destroy living men in a quest of dead men. Tachezy, however, did not even await the call for volunteers. He went. A few followed. He managed to extricate a dozen men from the *débris* of timber and winter that pinned them — and it was not swift work. He put forth such prodigies of strength as it was impossible to conceive in so elegant a frame. His assistants and two of the rescued perished. The rest he brought into safety on his own shoulders. It was a fine piece of gallantry.

The ordeal, however, did not leave his nervous system unaffected, and there had been grave fears for it already. When he proceeded, with wild eyeballs and his teeth grinning, to poke a stick into the burst flesh of a dead Neapolitan and trace hideous patterns in the snow, declaring himself to be the founder of a new school of painters, the “Sanguinistes,” it was thought advisable to shunt him gently behind the lines. He was a gibbering wreck by the time his wife joined him in Bozen; but that was partly because some fool had conveyed to him the news that his son, a yellow-haired delicate lad in his first teens, had been killed by a lorry in Vienna. After Tachezy had been in hospital for a period, his wife was bidden take him into some region where he might be as far removed as possible from war-contacts. They came to Midrans. They did not find the war there; but alas, they brought it with them. How could they not?

And they brought his doom to Hugo Harpf.

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I have given as much attention to Oskar Tachezy, soldier, as I shall be forced to give Oskar Tachezy, painter, because I can not in any other way hope to explain the extraordinary manner in which he impressed himself upon Midrans. During his stay in the village, I imagine the mouth of every villager, from the Burgermeister to Toni and Hiasl the Trotters, distended in a more or less permanent gape. It was as if he — and Marta, his wife, of course, a very beautiful doll of a woman — had taken their breaths away the moment they hove into sight from under the lee of the Felsenburg. They made their bow, prancing and curvetting on a spectacular pair of bays, though a couple of mules would have made the journey much safer and pleasanter for them. They were both infinitely charming and generous to everybody, and by dint of refusing to see how their charm and generosity exasperated everybody, they converted exasperation into bewilderment and bewilderment into tranced acceptance. No woman, not even the sardonic pipe-smoking harridans of Midrans, could withstand the graces of Tachezy. I should make an exception, I think, of Frau Harpf. She never was one of his victims. But then she was hardly even conscious of him. She remained immured in her aloofness. Her husband might strike her across the cheek, but it was only the blood that winced and ebbed. Her soul remained inviolate. Fanni, her daughter, on the other hand, fell prostrate before the charm of Tachezy. She almost transferred to him the frustrated virginal idolatry with which she embraced her saviour. The Hungarian became her solace for all past woes, her present rapture, her future hope. Not that she dreamed of interposing her bony self between the captain and his fragile lady, or even of taking her ineffable place should death leave it empty. He was her hope because

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he gave her future a meaning, a validity, for the first time. When the war was over, he would come to Midrans every summer, to see how Hugo, his protégé, was progressing towards the ideal he envisioned for him. Who would have thought that Hugo, of all people, with his daubings and smearings, would excite the interest of the great man more than anyone in the village?

So that when Hugo came back from his training in Munich. . . . But I must not let Fanni propel Hugo and myself too swiftly towards the empty-bellied city.

Poor Fanni blushed to the roots of her skimpy hair. So did Anna Schnegg, who was nearly as ugly. So did Moidel Wildhauer, who was twenty times as beautiful. They all blushed when Oskar Tachezy curtseyed to them like a lady-in-waiting in a play. And his compliments to them all were equally sincere, because he was not addressing them individually; he was hardly conscious of them, in fact, these raw-boned or too plump lasses, smelling of onions or cowsheds. He was addressing a pattern traced by his own fantasy. He could afford to treat it exquisitely.

But there is no doubt that without Fanni, he would not have achieved the success of his plans with respect to that astounding prodigy, Hugo Harpf. For for a long time old Harpf was flatly contemptuous of the whole idea, and old Harpf was one of the few Midransers whom the antics of Oskar Tachezy did not reduce to a state of loose-jawed imbecility. Marta Tachezy, the captain's wife, used her suasions too. But she tantalized him rather than lulled him, with her egg-shell cheeks and her too fluty voice. He wanted to hold her to the oaken ribs of his chest and feel her fragility crack, like an egg-shell.

As for the wife, Frau Harpf, the captain could make

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nothing of her, nothing at all. He did not feel that she opposed herself to his plans. She was so mysterious, so incalculable, that on the whole he would have preferred it if she had. She was like certain nights in midwinter at the front; she was like the haunted space between the lines. Anything might cross and recross that padded silence. One moment you thought it was populous as a market-place in a great city. Every hummock of snow was alive with menace. A moment later you realized that no antarctic ice-field was more barren. The desolation was a more terrible thing than all the fictitious multitude. If no shadow will fall there, if no sift of snow, even, will whisper, a man must scream, scream!

Oskar Tachezy rubbed his eyes. He must not occupy his mind too much with Frau Harpf, that silent lady.

Fanni, as I said, was his admirable lieutenant. Fanni would even miss a funeral to receive orders from her superior officer, and I hope I need not stress the gravity of such a preference. She had never wanted anything in her life before, excepting to cry in the wake of dead men and women; and this seemed now a paltry pleasure compared with the glory of the company of Oskar Tachezy. Why, though she was not a married woman, he had taken her hand and kissed it, half bending on one knee. Taken her hand and kissed it! Her heart bubbled like a bird in a wood. And if he did not succeed in getting Hugo sent away, he would lose interest in them all. He would never come back, never come back. Her heart tolled like the passing-bell in St. Florian's belfry. She clenched her teeth and stamped her feet. Deep down in the last pits of her soul were certain unsuspected wells of skill and determination. How skilful she would be! She would never let the old man

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know she — *she*, Fanni, the despised! — was pulling him by the nose. Hugo should go to Munich.

And Hugo did.

It seems obvious to me that Tachezy's unbridled resolution to send the youth away was just a condition of his neurasthenia, which the hostility of the father and the almost bovine indifference of the young man himself, not to mention the shrill expostulations of Nanni Tratzl — though Fanni soon cast a spell to exorcize these — exasperated almost unendurably. Marta Tachezy used all her own powers in reinforcement, because she realized that the good work which the doctors had hoped from Midrans, was not merely being undone but violently reversed, so long as this mania was upon him. I am not suggesting that Tachezy did not honestly believe that he had stumbled on a Cézanne, a Hodler, a Mantegna, an almost anything, in the making. But it is impossible not to draw certain deductions from the fact that the moment Hugo got into the electric railway, at the lower end of the Schlamms valley (the railway that meets the Innsbruck line at the tiny junction of Steinegg) — that at that moment Tachezy's interest in his earthquaking prodigy became lukewarm. And speaking at this moment rather from Fanni's point of view than anyone else's, it seems lamentable that he should never have returned to the Floriansthal to see in what directions the disciplined genius of young Harpf was taking him. Not in the directions, at least, that Tachezy had premeditated, in either the incandescent or the smouldering stages of his interest in the young painter. It seems lamentable that Tachezy should never have returned to the Floriansthal. But Fanni Harpf shed enough tears for her-

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self. I will shed none for her. And she has a new divinity now.

If I had any doubt that there was a great element of the neurotic in Tachezy's excitement over Hugo's painting, it is resolved for me by the fact that it was not the painting itself that first drew his attention. He cannot, for instance, have missed the fresco Hugo had completed for old Gebhardt a day or two before the arrival of the captain. Gebhardt was the butcher and never having had so prosperous a time as during these times of war, he took it into his head to beautify his house-front, its earlier gallery of frescoes having been obscured under an expensive coat of whitewash. It was agreed that some subject suitable to his craft should be executed, and old Harpf being elsewhere engaged at the time, Hugo took the work in hand. The theme decided on as appropriate to the premises, was the frustrated sacrifice of Isaac by his conscientious father. The knife was (and is) a minor *chef d'œuvre*, for which Gebhardt's most efficient cartilage-subduing instrument served as model. Gebhardt being no miser, he had requested that not only the angel of the lord should be represented, he who made so fortunate an interposition, nor the ram caught in a thicket by his horns, but, in addition to these, that wholly apocryphal demon who grins with malevolent glee at the unnatural horror he deems he is about to witness. The captain and his wife arrived on the evening of a Saturday, when Hugo would already have set off up the mountain to join his sweetheart, Nanni, in her alp-hut. Now the completion of a wall-painting is taken as a matter of course in Midrans, but there seems to have been a slight excitement in the village, that first Sunday

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of Tachezy's appearance, with respect to this same Gebhardt fresco. This might be, of course, a posthumous misreading of some fortuitous circumstance of a completely innocent nature. But it was said, I gather, that the demon Hugo had painted with no little relish in the left-hand corner of his space, was intended to look like Father Josef. It seems also to have been said that it was intended to look like Conrad von Felsenburg. Which would be a still more interesting supposition, if there were any substance in it, as being the first indication of a conscious hostility between Hugo and that gentleman. But I believe there is no substance in either supposition. Hugo had no feeling about Felsenburg until that distinguished robber knight, perpetuating the august and almost millennial tradition of his family, entered Hugo's own little fold and laid hands on Hugo's own lamb. The mere fact that the likeness was stated to be of two such different creatures as the priest and the Herr Baron, proves that none was intended. And I am pretty certain that if Hugo had intended a likeness, he could not have brought it off. These village artists of the Tirolese valleys are not portrait-painters, despite the quantity of elegiac art that is expected from them. It is an idealized Peppi, a quintessential Alois, that is commissioned when Peppi breaks his neck climbing after a kid that has got itself stuck in the crevice of a cliff, or Alois is smashed against a boulder in mid-stream after loosening the jam of timber he is floating down to the saw-mill. It is a Peppi with a smart military moustache that he might develop in heaven, but gave no hint of on earth; it is an Alois with neither squint nor hare-lip such as distinguished him in this mortal sphere.

But I have no right to enter upon the vexed question of the Gebhardt demon. There was some excitement about it,



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anyhow, when Tachezy got up that Sunday morning to take stock of Midrans, but he did not share it. It was the yellow hair of Hugo that first drew the captain's attention to him; or his wife's attention, rather, as I have stated early in this narrative.

"Oskar!" she cried, "Oskar! Oskar!" as she flung away from the window, and hurled herself upon his bosom. Very crossly he looked where she pointed. He knew that the doctors had ordered her to see that he did not get excited. A fine way this was to follow out their orders. Then his eyes too fell on the yellow hair of the youth painting the wall of one of old Prandl's barns, the one that stands forward from the inn on the right, against the orchard. He turned away and a moment later the two were sobbing in each other's arms, like babies. He had shed no tears since the news had come to him of his young son so wantonly killed in Vienna — a son some years younger than the youth on the ladder fifteen yards away, but with just such hair, and eyes as blue, or almost as blue, and just such square shoulders — shoulders inherited from neither himself nor his wife but from the blond Pomeranian landowners from whom she was descended. His tears loosened him, calmed him. His mind never rested at one point for long. And the youth? Who was he? What did he do? How did he live? He felt a lively interest in the lad quicken in him. He also suddenly remembered he, Oskar Tachezy, was an officer. It did not suit the dignity of an officer to have a woman crying down his neck. He clicked his heels and stood at attention.

"*Schweig!*" he commanded.

"Yes, darling!" she said. She looked up at him through the tears on her lashes. She knew they suited her.

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Not many days elapsed before Tachezy became aware that Hugo Harpf attempted more fastidious effects with paint and brushes than the whitewashing of a barn-wall. It is probable that many connoisseurs would find little to choose in fastidiousness between Hugo's painting of saints and devils on wood and his broader effects on walls. And I suppose Tachezy himself would have used any other word than precisely that one — fastidious. He was, in fact, ripe for a new enthusiasm, and he had more leisure than he had ever had in his life before to proclaim it. His career as a painter had been one continuous succession of unbridled enthusiasms, from that moment when, quite suddenly and without any warning at all, he found himself consumed with a burning passion to paint. His theories had always tended to overwhelm his practice; for no sooner had he begun to show a certain facility in the Munich mode of allegorical symbolism than a new doctrine, hot from Paris, had him by the throat, and painting consisted wholly of the presentation of receding planes. Having created even more confusion with his exegesis in the studio than in the messroom, he became aware that he had been selling himself to the very devil of literalism, to a more heinous form of photography than the mere naïve camera was capable of; and for the next few months, nothing that was not yellow was paint. It was the colour of validity, the aurum potabile of the alchemists made manifest and they had been blind to it from the birth of time. His canvases became a monotonous leprosy of mustard until, realizing that fact infallibly, he had a reaction towards the gloom and fire of Caravaggio and Zurbaran. A new quarterly from Montparnasse hurled him into the bosom of Gleizes and the cubists, whence with a precipitancy unusual even for him, he hurled himself out again

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and into the bosom of Marinetti and Russolo. On the tall chimneys of futurism he stretched his canvas. At last, he knew, he had found himself, but he reckoned without the World War. No long period had elapsed before the thought of anybody or anything Italian was a stink in his nostrils, but his duties on the Col di Lana prevented him from discovering elsewhere his soul's haven. It is true that at this time he founded the school of painting called Sanguinisme, but he was at once sole professor and disciple, and he must have realized quite early that the material for the expression of its doctrines would not often be at hand. He was ripe for the discovery of Primitivismus, and his adulation of Hugo, like his fabulous good manners with women, was once more something which had less relation with the physical object in his line of sight than with the pattern he had composed in his spirit.

The Primitivismus of Hugo came pat on his violent reaction from the iconoclasm of the futurists. He saw that the images, so far from being broken, were quite steadily being carved and painted with the natural redundancy and persistency of flowing water. All the enthusiasm which he once dowered upon the latest cult of Paris or Moscow, he expended upon the form of art he had now for the first time discovered and would certainly not have deemed a form of art at all, had he met it before. A Hungarian, he had at all times been possessed of a lordly contempt for the cloddish peasantry of Tirol — “Pah! the *Geschärrte!* The shorn ones!” he would have snorted delicately had anyone brought their existence to his notice before. Now he realized in them a well of art vigorous and undefiled, concentrating its limpid waters into the fine jet called Hugo Harpf.

He must have shut his eyes to the existence of several

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dozen youths and men who spent that portion of their spare time not devoted to drink or cards or clandestine love-making to the production of objects, carved or painted, hardly to be distinguished from Hugo's. Or if he permitted himself to be aware of them at all, it was to congratulate himself still more joyfully that he had stumbled upon a living tradition, in the full sense of the words, upon a congregation of artists as devoted and as unprofessional as the monks of a mediæval monastery. From the standpoint of a later observer, the significant thing about such work as can be attributed to Hugo and such as can not, is that it could all be interchanged quite easily. For one would have thought there would be a sort of professional slickness about his tablets and letterings and the rest, absent from the products of the shoemaker and the miller. There is not. They all drew out of the same ancestral well of casual tradition. Which idea, of course, is exactly the idea that Oskar Tachezy would not permit himself to entertain. He had found his heaven-born genius; he had found the original who would render into deathless paint these mountains, these peasants, these legends that spread their swarthy branches over their roof-trees.

Hugo Harpf and the world should profit by his own mistakes. He knew now why he, Oskar Tachezy, was a failure, after all. (He could permit himself the sweet agony of humility in the glory of his discovery, in the thought of the splendour that must later come to him when the world acknowledged the . . . the Michelangelo that would have been lost if not for Oskar Tachezy's perspicacity.) He, Tachezy, was a failure because he had no roots. The smartest cadet in the dance-halls in Budapest had had no thought for perspective, modelling, anatomy, chiaroscuro. He had attempted to fly before he could walk.

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And there was, in fact, a certain shrewdness in the present tenor of his thoughts. He was aware that Hugo was merely the youngest (and infinitely, of course, the most inspired) of a line of peasant artists. The faculty was common, but fitful, in the other families of Midrans. With the Harpfs it was inveterate. Not the avarice of the Tratzls, the lechery of the Felsheims, the dishonesty of the Ganners, had such roots in the history of the place. Why then had some Harpf during that antiquity not gone forth and subdued Tirol, Austria, Europe? The Harpfs had reached a certain stage and gone no further. The present Harpf was beginning to fumble even now. He lacked technique, he lacked training. Hugo should not.

Hugo should not.

Hugo must go to Munich, to the Akademie there. From eight to twelve in the morning he would draw from the nude, from two to six he would do anatomy. (Tachezy lost no time in getting the necessary documents. Nothing was beyond the reach of Tachezy excepting a sense of humour. If he could have ordered a sense of humour from Munich, he too might have halted suddenly, as I did some years later, by the well of the maidenhair-fern. He too would have thrust his head back and bared his teeth and guffawed into the noonday. He too would have gained the reputation of being a Trottell, but it would have hurt his amour-propre more than it did mine. He would have laughed so uproariously at the memory of the sort of thing he used to say about academies and art professors, his excoriating sarcasms. His contempt for these institutions had been almost the only constant factor in his philosophic vicissitudes. His conversion to them, if conversion is not too mild a word, must be attributed partly to his frantic reaction against futurism and the "italianissimo"

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Marinetti. He did not perceive that in futurism a new academy was established as stringent as the old ones. He saw, in fact, nothing but red; and, those scarlet fumes dispersed, the figure of the peasant youth striding, a yellow-haired colossus with a raven upon his shoulder, one foot set in the valleys of holy Tirol and the other upon the *débris* of the smashed studios of Milan.)

Hugo must go to the Akademie in Munich.

Between seven-thirty and ten he would study gesture, and at night, in his rooms, till one or two in the morning, or at the earliest till midnight, he would study anatomy or the lives of the masters, and do a little sketching on his own, perhaps, but not too much. Next morning, eight till twelve, he would draw from the nude again. But on Tuesday afternoons, two till six —

I think I might state at once, that when Hugo returned from Munich (when he will cease to have any interest for us at all as an artist) he never painted a stroke again. Nothing more, at least, than a barn-wall, and the technique of painting barn-walls was a matter they paid no attention to in the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in the Akademiestrasse, in Munich.

Tachezy had a friend at court, in the shape of the fluttered Fanni. He needed one.

"*Kunst!*" boomed old Harpf, bringing his fist down on the table. "Will it feed my pigs? Will it dung the potato-patch?"

Tachezy squealed. His nose and his knuckles became deathly white, but he managed to keep control of himself. He realized that if he screeched like a monkey it would not impress that stock of gnarled oak. Then it occurred to him, and he stated, that the prices of a Manet or a Hodler

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might, in fact, feed ten valleys chock-a-block with pigs, ham to ham. He turned the conversation in the direction of dealers and their shops in Bond Street and the Rue de la Boétie. He saw the glint of avarice slant across the old peasant's eyes. He need not wholly despair of Franz Harpf.

But somehow he could not awaken in Hugo's eyes, those pale blue expressionless lakes, any such response. The fuss that the stranger made about his saints and devils embarrassed and irritated Hugo. The sudden dew of tears with which Frau Tachezy would bedew his hair drove him to fury, so far as he was capable of any such fervent emotion. That particular habit of the lady was, it might be stated, the most potent ally of Fanni's subterranean activities. She did not suspend them night or day, though neither Franz nor Hugo was aware she conducted them.

As for Nanni Tratzl, she tossed her head in the air: "And what use will it be to me," she proclaimed, "to have as my man an elegant from the city? I have heard about them, these town people. Well, let him go. I won't bother *my* head about him. He can do as he pleases. There are many young men in the Floriansthal. And in the Stubai-thal. And in the Emmsthal. There are many young men."

Fanni perceived that she must ascend to Nanni in her hut and make her see wisdom too. It needed much ingenuity on her part to get away from the house, but the mere fact that nobody in the world could have believed that Fanni was conducting an intrigue, simplified things for her both in Midrans and up in the mountain. She was very wily. Before long Nanni was feeling indignant that Hugo had not seen from the beginning what a wonderful opportunity this was going to be to buy his sweetheart ear-rings and ribbons and brooches and kerchiefs, such as

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nobody in the whole valley sported, not even Moidel Wildhauer, nor the proud Phini Prandl of the White Lamb.

Hugo Harpf went forth, as I have said, to Munich. Oskar Tachezy was too much for him. Or should I not say the bewitched Fanni, his sister? Hugo found the train carrying him away from the remote terminus *en route* for Steinegg and Innsbruck, almost before he was thoroughly aware that he had left the village square. If he needed consolation, he doubtless found it in the enormous parcel of food which his mother had prepared for him, Wurst and Schinken, cheese and bread, wine, cake, fruit, butter, a slab of Schweinsbraten, another of Rindfleisch, a hunk of Speck. It did not occur to him that the spirit in which she prepared these things was the spirit of one who assures herself that her dead shall not go hungry in the tomb. Yet it was her own hunger in the sunless places she was preparing for. Doubtless she knew it better than her husband and the lad who was leaving her; and she may have hoped that her own hunger might phantasmally be appeased whilst the lad stuffed his maw with the foods she had prepared for him more amply and succulently than she had ever prepared food before. Frau Harpf was dead not many weeks later. It is possible that Hugo had a prescience of her death. For that final kiss, the moment before the train left the station, which Nanni Tratzl expected to carry back to Midrans upon her own lips, he conferred upon the chill lips of his mother, standing bloodless and lean like a saint carved out of bone. He kissed her with a passion not frequently shown by a son for his mother among that hard-bitten peasantry. Some minutes later he had his teeth in his Schweinsbraten, aware of nothing else than how beautifully roasted it was. He did not see the scowl on

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Nanni Tratzl's face for it might have helped him to anticipate her defection some months later. Nor did he witness that slight passage between his sister, Fanni, and Oskar Tachezy, his patron. He did not see how the woman, transfigured, seized Tachezy's hand and carried it to her lips and how she looked into his eyes, for that single glance of approbation which should reward her for all her schemings. He did not see how Tachezy snatched back his hand and stared at her as if she were a clot of dirt.

Hugo had enough to think of with his Schweinsbraten in his right hand and Hans, the raven, in a basket by his left knee.

"Caw! Caw! Caw!" cried the raven impatiently. "I too want something to eat!"

"Here is some red Wurst for you!" said Hugo. "Eat!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

THIS is a story of unsubtle people and its developments proceed through no more refined climaxes than love, hunger, lust, vanity. It will be no disappointment, I trust, that nothing more grandiose than mere food was to grant Hugo the freedom of a potency such as men have not attributed to a man for more centuries than I know. It is true that in that great congregation of which Hugo and the peasants of Midrans were one of the smallest and obscurest companies, there have been saints in plenty, venerables, beatifics, during the period sometimes curiously named "the age of reason." There are many holy persons, I do not doubt, who are in process of passing from one of these stages to the next more glorious. But they are dead. And they are all benevolent. But Hugo was accepted as their equal in potency by these Midransers, though he was neither one nor the other. Nor does the belief in his potency diminish, although his thigh-bones, unlike theirs, ease no women in child-birth and make no crops more abundant. Unlike them again, he needed no deliberations of cardinals nor pronouncements of popes to attest his faculty. I confess that I have heard of certain others in our own time, as little likely as Hugo to receive such august ratifications, to whom powers not unlike Hugo's have been attributed; but they have never been attributed in such a manner that cynics could not claim

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that their thaumaturgy was not resolvable at length into the hysteria of those who attested it. There is, however, no cynic in Midrans who will deny his powers to Hugo, though there are cynics there. The bulk of the villagers, of course, are religious in a desperate degree, whether their conscious allegiance is to Christ and their less conscious, or quite unconscious, allegiance is to his predecessors. There are two types of cynic: those whose will is so strong that there is no idea accepted by other men which their will does not dispute; and those others who accept nothing for precisely the opposite reason: they have the desire to accept but not the strength. The strong-jowled, black-bearded Burgermeister, Lorenz Brachmond, and Adolf Amrain, the straw-haired, eyebrowless schoolmaster, are admirable instances of each category. It was their instinct and their official duty throughout to sit upon the fence. But they doubted the miracles of Hugo no more than Father Josef, who believed him Satan — or, at least, Satanic — or Franz Holzhammer, who believed him Christ.

It was nothing more grandiose than mere food that initiated Hugo into that further dimension in which the elements that are our masters become the slaves of certain other humans, chosen more and less mysteriously for the exercise of such lordship. I say nothing more grandiose than food; but I will say also that only those wretches who lived in the blockaded cities of Europe during the middle and later stages of the war can conceive how there is no commodity, tangible or intangible, so grandiose. For food became in cities like Hamburg, Munich, Vienna, something inconceivably greater than itself. It became something abstract, a principle, a woe, a rapture. I am inclined to accept the opinion of one or two observers that the beaten peoples — I speak of the dwellers in cities, for these controlled

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the rest — might have acknowledged and submitted to their defeat some seasons earlier, if they had not been so desperately engaged upon a quest for food that possessed them from moment to moment, each minute, every hour, all day. They might, with clearer minds fed by less rare and less unwholesome food, have perceived the certainty of doom and been intimidated by it. But no defeat intimidated them and no victory animated them; they were as absorbed by the chance of begging a fresh kilogram of potatoes as mystics are by God. Food became, in dreadful and vulgar senses, as well as in a metaphysical sense, a mystery. It is not to be wondered at, that Hugo Harpf, the peasant youth from Midrans, should enter through hunger into trance and miracle, if it is accepted that any human creature might, under any combination of circumstances at all. I feel for my own part that the nursling of such elements as compose the landscape of Midrans, both natural and human, that the offspring of loins so violent, the issue of a womb so sibylline, might more easily be conceived the exerciser of such powers as are attributed to Hugo Harpf, than any pale penitent or flushed rhapsodist, from whom those powers (I cannot help thinking) must the more cooly recede the more urgently they are prayed for.

Hugo Harpf spent eight or nine months in Munich. From the first moment in which he felt himself outside the confines of his native land, a mere bundle of luggage that the train was carting to Munich, till the moment in which he suddenly snapped the bondage Munich had imposed on him — snapped it as a man awakening under a hedge might snap the threads of gossamer which fasten about him — the insolent persistence of food did not leave him. "*Kunst!*" gibbered Oskar Tachezy. "*Kunst!*" boomed Franz Harpf. There was no other *Kunst* than the art of

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persuading the empty belly it was full, the art of persuading straw to be bread, swedes to be meat, apple-peel to be tea, and swedes once more, again and again and again, to be each of these alternately.

He had consoled himself for any lurking melancholy, during the first stage of his journey, by making an inroad into the mountain of food his mother had prepared for him. The folk who surrounded him were peasants like himself. The spectacle of so large a quantity of food, which one pair of jaws were managing to subdue as if it were ten, caused no special interest. It might have caused more on the Innsbruck line, but during that part of the journey he was content to nibble an odd loaf or devour an odd sausage. It was Hans who monopolized attention on the journey to Innsbruck. But by the time that Hugo had changed into the Munich train and was approaching Jenbach, the excitement and the fatigue of his adventure made him feel hungry again. The people in the carriage with him were townsmen, for the most part; with rucksacks sagging forlornly over the wretched haul of fruit or vegetables they had managed to cadge at preposterous prices from farmers of the Innthal. Hugo undid his parcel, and proceeded to arrange some of the items it contained upon the lid of the basket in which he had replaced the raven.

It could not be said of the youth that he was morbidly sensitive; on the other hand he was no clod. I cannot say at what precise stage of the journey his cheeks flamed into consciousness of the burning eyes concentrated upon them, and upon his mouth, and his teeth, and the breast of chicken his teeth were tearing, and the bottle of wine which accompanied it. His cheeks flamed up suddenly, like a piece of paper upon which the rays of the sun are concentrated through a magnifying glass. He became aware of

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the pinched cheeks about him, the tremulous fingers, above all the mournful rapacious eyes. For nearly a year he was to confront no eyes which were not rapacious and mournful as these. At Wörgl he got out of the carriage, taking only Hans and Hans's basket with him, and the rucksack hanging from his shoulders. He entered a carriage at the rear end of the train, with a sense of discomfort he could not banish all the long way to Kufstein and Munich. He thought he could still hear them scuffling and yapping over the food he had left behind. But indeed it had taken them not many seconds to pounce upon it and devour it, clean and complete as vultures might pick a lamb; it seemed to them the substance of miracle, and the youth with yellow hair and blue pale eyes a visitant from elsewhere. Soon, soon, they thought, natural order would reassert itself. They sat awkwardly and silently for the rest of the journey, avoiding each other's eyes.

Here, at length, was Munich.

2

The station at Munich was so vast, noisy and miserable that the bewildered five minutes during which Hugo stood on the platform, gaping, provided him at once with a condensed epitome of everything he was to endure for the next eight or nine months. In his right hand a stick lopped from a mountain ash, in his left hand the raven in his basket, in the hollow of his back his bulging rucksack, a green-ribboned velours hat on his head, a pair of antique leather shorts about his thighs, a pair of dog-toothed mountain boots on his feet, a void in his stomach and a homesickness in his eyes — he seemed altogether an un-

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likely candidate for those high honours in the Pantheon of painting to which Oskar Tachezy had so magnanimously devoted him. It was quite a number of hours since he had eaten anything. He was, in Munich, never again to know, excepting upon one occasion, or at most upon two, what it was not to be hungry. Yet when all was said and done, it was not many hours altogether since he had stood in his own land among his own people. A young man of seventeen, going forth under such auspices to win fame and fortune, had no right so soon to be feeling so completely wretched. Who shall compare the cowsheds of Midrans with the palaces of Munich? And the zither, the Hackbrettel, what music do they make in the scale of the massed instruments of opera, the aspiring organ of the Frauenkirche? Had not all senatorial laws and ordinances been set aside on behalf of Hugo Harpf through the agency of the lordly Tachezy? Was he not by some months too young to enter the Akademie this semester and had not Tachezy cajoled, blustered, wheedled the Senate until the young peasant, like any lordling from the Stella Matutina, might be permitted to draw nude necks and study assembled vertebræ? He had paid his entrance fee, and had even given him a little money in advance to keep him going for a month or two, until the noble Hungarian should receive further draughts from Budapest, whence further instalments were to be derived for the cultivation of young genius in Munich. Hugo was to live on the money and buy himself an easel and other materials; but unfortunately the greater part of the Hungarian moneys had been abstracted by Franz Harpf, in virtue of the assistance which that craftsman was not going to receive for the next few seasons from his assistant. A certain modicum was expected by that gentleman from all further instalments.

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But that was no reason to depress Hugo standing on the station platform, with a film suspiciously like a tear forming upon his blue eyes. Did no one ever die in Munich? Were there no tablets to paint, no mottos for inn-parlours to execute? Might he not carve Christs and sell them? And, moreover, Hugo had a note from the noble Hungarian in the inside pocket of his light blue jacket. Frau Kieltrunk, a woman painter, a friend of Tachezy's, would be delighted to put Hugo up and look after him, until he found a nice landlady somewhere not too far from the Akademie. †

He grasped his stick, gave a friendly shake to old Hansl — you need never be either hungry or homesick with Hansl in the neighbourhood — and set forth from the station to find the æsthetic quarter of Munich — Schwabing they call it — and Frau Kieltrunk, who lived in the Herzogstrasse.

It would be of no especial relevance to describe the sensations of the peasant youth as he made his way through the darkening streets of the great city towards his destination. He arrived ultimately, but much later than he might have done, for Schwabing is no distance northward of the Englischer Garten. Nor is it to be imagined that he had no instructions. With that exquisite sense of the inapposite which was characteristic of him, Tachezy had provided the boy with a pen-and-ink chart of the journey to be taken from the station. Hugo might have made Frau Kieltrunk's acquaintance an hour or two earlier had he not attempted to find her by means of the chart. But the young man who could have found his way home to his father's house in Midrans, blindfold upon a night of storm, from some wild aerie among the remoter backward moun-

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tains of Midrans, found the city more trackless than primeval jungle. The simile did not occur to him, but it would have been more apposite than he knew, for Tachezy, once engaged upon his chart of directions, had let his fancy run free. In the Hofgarten he had set down a herd of lions, with the legend "Hic Sunt Leones"; by the Staatsbibliothek he had proclaimed "Hic Sunt Filii Terrae, Gigantes." The Sirens sang in the Ludwigstrasse, and at the Siegestor Dragon lashed his tail.

Tachezy had his moments of humour, it will be perceived. Perhaps it should not be called humour; there was acute social criticism in the misplaced witticisms. Lions did not lack in the Munich of 1917 — vast Schiebers, profiteers, who roared and shook their manes. And there were Sirens ready to sell all their charms for a quarter kilo of coffee. Giants there were too, bemedalled generals, foolish and monstrous. And Dragon Hunger raised himself upon his squamous tail above the Siegestor and glared down upon the gaunt city and clashed his terrific jaws.

It was some minutes after midnight when Hugo at length knocked upon the pillared porticoed door of Frau Kieltrunk's house in the Herzogstrasse. The shortcomings of his education must be remembered, if it is objected against him that midnight is no time at all for a young stranger to present a note of introduction, even from an Oskar Tachezy, to a lady who lives in the Herzogstrasse. And in such a house in the Herzogstrasse! But by this time Hugo's brain was too numb to entertain any further sense of terror and awe, even if he had known that the portal upon which he rapped his knuckles led to the august presence of the King of Bavaria.

But it did not. He had hardly rapped at the door at all (not aware that electric bells were a more usual mode of

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summons in these regions) when the door slid noiselessly back, and a lady was manifest before him, a strange tall lady. It was dark. He could not see more than that. But strange she was certainly. And tall, very tall.

"Frau Kieltrunk?" the youth asked, half swooning.

"*Ja wohl!*" said the lady. "Who then? Hush! Not so loud!" She placed a finger on her lip. "Come in! Don't make a noise!"

He found she had shut the door behind him as noiselessly as she had opened it.

"Ah! so the high-well-born lady was expecting me?" said Hugo, a quiver of jubilation in his voice. This could not mean anything else but food. What did they eat in Munich? Did they make Speck-Knödel, bacon-dumplings? Did they follow up with Kaiser-Schmarren? Or Apfel-kiechel, perhaps, apple-fritters?

"*Selbst-verständlich!*" said the high-well-born lady. She was preceding him up a wide carpeted stairway. "Of course I was!"

"So he wrote to you then?" There was a catch in his voice. How villainously he had behaved towards her friend, the Hungarian gentleman! What a lump he had been! And now the gentleman's nice lady friend was taking him to have some supper. Perhaps it would be Salzburger Kockerl, after the Knödel? It was only upon weddings that Frau Prandl had Salzburger Kockerl served in the White Lamb. He had eaten some five months ago when the elder Schnegg girl got married. All puffy it was, like a cloud, or the cheeks of a cherub. Grand stuff!

Did they have it on ordinary workdays in Munich?

"He didn't write to me!" he heard her say — rather sharply, he felt. "We arranged it when I was there!"

That was curious, thought Hugo. He could not remem-

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ber seeing Frau Kieltrunk about in Midrans. Perhaps he had been up with Nanni on the alp? Or the Herr Hauptmann and his lady had gone over to see the high-well-born one in Schlamms?

"In here!" she ordered. She switched a light on. He followed her into an enormous room with a sloping glass roof. Yes, this was an "atelier," as the captain had called it. He had talked for hours one day about Frau Kieltrunk's studio parties. Marvellous, they were. Such food! Such drink! Schaumwein, too, wine that bubbled.

Should he have Schaumwein to wash down the Knockerl?

He made out, across the nausea of his hunger, the incredible canvases on the wall and on the two easels beyond a dais. Such a nightmare as not poor old Toni himself could have conceived in the bewitched woods! Must he do these things before he, too, was a painter and Oskar Tachezy smiled upon him and patted him on the shoulder and gave him lots more money and took him to — where was it? Yes, the place called Paris. He blinked. He had not, despite his lifelong trafficking with colours, had the faintest notion that colours such as these existed at all — the shrimp-pinks, the magentas, the poison-greens. And the lady herself, he could see her now for the first time. She had a huge loose spongy garment about her, yellow, with a girdle like a monk's cord. She wore sandals. There was a green ribbon bound round her forehead and her lump of coppery hair.

But her lean face! And her glaring eyes! Why did her hands tremble so? She was trembling in every limb. She looked like . . . like what? — like that falcon that had once come down upon their house to steal some chickens she had sighted. She had reckoned without Hansl — brave

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old Hansl! Hansl knew his place in the woods; he was a discreet bird in the woods; he took no unnecessary risks. But here — by the roof-tree of his master! This was preposterous! With a howl of fury the raven flung himself upon the falcon. The air was black with feathers. The falcon at length realized . . .

"Well, then!" he heard the lady's voice snap. "How of it? Have you got nothing for me!"

"But, indeed, high-well-born one!" He felt in the inside pocket of his coat. "Yes! Here it is!"

He reached his note of introduction towards her. She stamped her foot furiously. "It can wait!" she cried. "It can wait! I told him I wasn't going to argue about prices! Take the rucksack off!"

He looked about him helplessly, then placed his stick upon a divan a few feet away from him, and, still clutching Hansl's basket tight, he slipped one shoulder out of the strap of his rucksack.

The woman lost control of herself completely. "*Bauer!*" she shrieked. "Peasant! Give it me! What has he put in here!" She tore the basket out of his hand. She undid the latchet feverishly.

"*Vorsicht!*" he cried. "Careful! Look out!"

She whooped with triumph. "Ah, eggs! Eggs!" her eyes glistened. "Never fear! I won't smash them!" She flung back the basket-lid. Hans, having been cooped up for many hours, sped past her like a thunderbolt. He alighted upon the bar of an easel and croaked deliriously.

Frau Kieltrunk staggered back. "What's this? Making a fool of me, are you, both of you? I'm in no mood for *Bauern-humor*, I tell you! And what about the eighty marks deposit?" She was blazing like a dervish. Her pei-

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gnoir had slipped, leaving exposed her gaunt collar-bones and shoulder-blades. Her eyeballs rolled. He tried to make some feeble noises of remonstrance. His prostrated wits were beginning to be aware there was some misunderstanding. She ignored the noises he made as completely as if they were the creaking of a chair.

"But the butter, at least!" she continued. "You've got the butter in there! In there! *Sau-Bauer!* Pig-peasant! In there! In your rucksack! I'll have the law on him! It's as bad for him as for me! I don't care if the other people in the house hear! And my potatoes! My ten kilo of potatoes! Open it, I tell you, open it! Do you think I'll handle the filth? And my flour! Where's the flour he promised me?"

"But look, *bitte!* You see . . . let me . . ."

"Open it!"

There was obviously nothing else to do. He undid the cord of his rucksack and lifted the flap. She shouldered him aside and thrust her hands into it, into its assortment of shirts, boots, ties, best coat for feast-days, stockings. Slowly she lifted her hands out again. An infinite weariness and frustration came into her eyes. She sank down on to the divan beside the rucksack.

"You have not come from Glessner's farm?" she whispered. "Who are you then?"

"I am Hugo Harpf. I come from Midrans."

"Midrans! Midrans!" she repeated emptily.

"I have a letter for you," he said. "Here. The Herr Hauptmann gave it to me." Her sunken eyes were like extinguished cinders. "*Bitte!*" he implored. She held out a skinny hand.

"I am so hungry!" she said.

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"It is from the Hauptmann Tachezy!" he went on. "He sent me here!"

She sprang up from the divan grotesquely, like a mechanical toy. Her cheeks flamed.

"What!" she cried. "Oskar Tachezy!"

"*Eben*, most gracious one. Even so. The Captain Oskar Tachezy!"

She tore the note Hugo had given her into two and flung the pieces into his face. "Take *that* to him!" she shrieked. "The impertinence! The insolence! How *dare* he! Take your things and go! Do you understand? Go! Go!"

"Yes!" the youth stammered. His brain churned. Sparks danced before and behind his eyes. "Hansl!" he called. But the bird knew they were leaving that place. There was nothing to hope for here — no bacon-dumplings, no apple-fritters. The youth fumbled with the latchet. He could not see the holes in the strap properly. His eyes were misty.

"Take your muck!" the woman cried, flinging his rucksack and stick before him on to the landing. Hugo staggered out after them. The door behind him banged like an oath. He made his way downstairs with knees feeble as straw. He never set eyes again on that strange tall lady; nor did he learn at any time the nature of the relationship between her and Oskar Tachezy. Perhaps Oskar Tachezy himself could not have told him. The captain must have forgotten that some difference had arisen between his friend and himself. Otherwise it is not conceivable that he should have expected his name to commend his protégé to her graces.

"I wish I was home!" groaned Hugo, staggering out into the dead expanse of the Herzogstrasse.

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He had no idea of what was going to happen to him now. It seemed clear that the classes of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste would not be proceeding at that hour. He wandered about for a stretch of time and through a maze of streets, both beyond computation. Now and again fitful figures attached themselves to him like autumn leaves. He did not need to brush them aside in order that they should fall from him, whispering, into the gutter. They were women. Sometimes they put their skinny arms through his and breathed words into his ear.

“What hast thou, then, in the rucksack, peasant? Pretty boy, wilt thou come home with me, then?”

He was too dispirited to make any sort of reply. In a few minutes the woman had dropped behind him. She had no strength to keep pace. Here was another, gentle, distraught, like a leaf out of which the sap is drying.

“Is it potatoes, then? What dost thou want for thy potatoes?”

He trudged on, even Hansl becoming in his weakness a burden for him to carry.

Here was more activity in the streets. The hideous clarity of his own iron-shod boots rang less sonorously among the rhythmic tread of feet. Soldiers. Ah, yes, here was the station again. He fell in behind them, some being recruits, such as he must be before many months had passed, peasants from Schwarzwald, from the Elbe, from Oberbayern. He went with them into a bare waiting-room and threw down his rucksack. Some of them might have food. They might offer him some. But they had none. In an hour their train had arrived. He was left alone in the waiting-room. No, not wholly alone. It was time Hansl had a breath of air again. With weak fingers he undid the latchet of the basket and the bird flapped on to his shoulder at

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once. Hugo's head lolled upon his bosom and he did not know if he slept for three minutes or three hours. Dawn came in murkily through the dirty panes of the roof, but it was a quick stab under the ribs that awakened him. He held his stomach and looked about him desperately. A gleam of scarlet caught his eye in the corner of Hansl's basket, under the straw. It was like a berry in holly, like the breast of a robin in a bare tree; it was a joyous scarlet, it was blood, it was music, it was food. It was nothing else than a fragment of that red sausage Hugo had given Hansl upon setting out. He stuffed his mouth with it and bit off a lump for the bird. With trembling fingers he fumbled among the straw, wondering how he could have forgotten Hansl's divine habit of insuring against possible hunger in a world so full of perils and surprises. Chunks of roast pig, of cheese, of chicken — of everything that Hansl might possibly want to eat or not want to eat, so long as it was stealable — never had Hugo conceived that food might be so miraculous. Yet he was one day to find it still more a miracle.

"My little *Raubtier*," breathed Hugo, "my little beast of prey!"

3

Altogether, this second day in Munich started more propitiously than Hugo could have dared to hope. He had religiously sought out and divided between Hansl and himself the last crumb in their heavenly hoard when the crowd from a train that had just arrived began to push through the waiting-room on the way out of the station, or to settle down upon their luggage while waiting for a train to carry them further. At no great distance from

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Hugo two young men slipped their rucksacks from their shoulders and, the benches being occupied, proceeded to make themselves comfortable on the floor. It could not be said of Hugo that he was of an observant frame of mind and that human beings, as a species, interested him. But his recent experiences had sharpened his faculties, and it became evident to him shortly that the two young men had just arrived from his own country, Tirol. The only animal noises not addressed to him which he had hitherto consciously listened to had been the breathing of cattle; more particularly since his brother, Franzl, had gone to be a soldier. But listening to these young men, he discovered that though they were Tirolers, they were his own metropolitans, Innsbruckers; at first flush, a not too happy discovery. For the airs the Innsbruckers put on was a subject of ribaldry even among the dalesmen of the Floriansthal. They considered themselves as elegant as the Viennese or the Berliners, and considered that the high mountains that hemmed them in had prevented them from erecting a city for the exercise of their natural talents, as notable as any in the German States. One of the two young men, the long one, was everything the Midrans mind could have pictured of Innsbruck elegance. You saw it in the careful way he unwrapped a piece of newspaper and spread it on the floor to sit on it. You saw it in the careful grooming of his hair and clothes. It was the more striking because the features and frame which were the objects of so much attention were emaciated with hunger. There was something curiously cadaverous about all this elegance. His companion was of a different sort. He was no less emaciated, but you felt of him that so far as a human being might forget hunger that young man might. He wore enormous spectacles which

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seemed to constitute his face, excepting for the brow which topped them. The rest, cheeks, mouth, chin, seemed irrelevant appendages. He gave the impression of having no nose at all, like a skull, excepting for the bridge on which the spectacles rested. He was a student, so much was evident. He was already fingering the book he had drawn from his coat-pocket — it was a textbook of anatomy — by the time his companion had reached the waist of the young lady he was describing. By the time the elegant one had reached the lobes of her ears, which were unique, the studious one had attained that division of the spinal column into vertebræ which she shared with the whole of her species. The conversation was becoming more and more fitful and one-sided, when the elegant one placed upon his lips the words “Akademie der Bildenden Künste” — each syllable pronounced with a scornful sonority.

Upon which Hugo at length, having for some minutes suspected it, concluded that these two young men might be students too. In mere years they were doubtless his own age, or the army would already have had them. Or if they were soldiers in civilian clothes, and their rank had any correspondence with their air of gravity and importance, they were certainly lieutenant-colonels.

Hugo made so bold as to address them. Were they, in fact, students at the Akademie? The studious one examined him and thought him worthy of no deep scrutiny. The elegant one replied with a certain affability. They were. Or to be exact, he himself was. His distinguished friend was proceeding to take up his studies in the Hochschule. The conversation ceased. The elegant one drummed his long fingers — he had beautifully-shaped fingers, like a girl's — upon his knee.

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"And I, too," said Hugo. "I am going to study at the Akademie. I am going to be a great painter."

The elegant one was alert at once. "I am happy to make your acquaintance. And so you are going to be a great painter. Curious, so am I. What school were you at? I gather you are one of us. You are a Tiroler. Were you at Feldkirch?" He examined the leather shorts and the mountain boots without impoliteness. "You have been doing a mountain tour?"

"Oh, no. I've come straight from home. Captain Tachezy has sent me to study here."

"Who?"

"Captain Oskar Tachezy. You haven't heard of him?"

"I don't meet the lower ranks. Sorry, I haven't had the pleasure."

"And you see — I haven't been at a school. Adolf Amrain taught me, like the others."

"And who then is Herr Amrain? A relative of the military gentleman?"

"Oh, no. Oh, no. He's the village schoolmaster."

"I understand. You are a genius. You have not studied at all, at any mere school. Do sit down, won't you?" Hugo sat down. "You are from the country."

"I've never been out of Midrans till now. Schlamms, of course, and once I went to Seldrans for a rifle-match."

"Midrans? Where's that? Schlamms — Oh yes, I remember now, beyond Steinegg, eh? And your father, if I may ask?"

"Well, he's the village-painter by rights. But there's not so much doing these days. Excepting for the butcher, Gebhardt, who's making a lot of money. I did an Abraham and Isaac for him and then they all came ——"

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"Perfectly. I understand. But your father? He's a farmer too? He has beasts?"

Even Hugo could not fail to observe the crescendo of interest in the elegant young man's voice and eyes.

"Well," he replied modestly, "not like old Tratzl or the other Wildhauer, or even Ganner. But he manages."

"What? He has cows? He makes butter? And cheese? What does he grow? Do you keep pigs?"

The elegant one had positively ceased from elegance. He looked a very starved and very wistful boy. The spectacles of the other one, the studious one, had risen above the horizon of his textbook, silently and enormously like two moons.

"Butter — Cheese — Pigs!" he intoned sepulchrally.

His friend was digging him excitedly in the ribs. But it was not to these thrusts he was responding so much as to the repercussions of these ideas in his brain.

"Butter — Cheese — Pigs!" he repeated.

The eyes of both young men simultaneously fell upon Hansl's basket, which Hugo had placed between his feet for safety.

"And in there?" they exclaimed. "What have you got? What have you got? Is it eggs?"

Hugo had only too recently been the victim of precisely the same misunderstanding. "No! No!" he hastened anxiously to assure them. "No! It's only a bird!"

"A bird?" they cried. "Oo-oo!" came from them breathlessly. The ankles of living ladies and the vertebrae of dead ones were of no more concern for them, now and evermore. Their eyes shone. "A chicken?"

Hugo felt like blubbering with grief and vexation. "No!" he said sickly.

"What then? A duckling?"

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"A raven!" he pronounced, under his teeth.

There was a hurt and bitter silence. The light flickered out of their eyes.

"You won't get much for that," said the elegant one crossly.

"I — but you — I don't want anything," cried Hugo earnestly. "He's alive!"

"Alive? What for?"

"Well — you understand ——" For the first time in their relations Hansl seemed a little hard to explain.

"The *Bauern!*" said the student significantly, relapsing towards his textbook. "The peasants!"

"Yes," mused the other. "I suppose the peasants have strange tastes. Never mind," he insisted kindly. "If you stay on long enough in Munich he'll come in useful, I haven't any doubt at all. It's been bad enough in Innsbruck."

Hugo was not at all certain how he meant it. That Hansl was going to be useful in the sense of last night, as a forager, a hider of food in secret store-houses? Or that Hansl was to be useful as . . . But he did not allow himself to give words to the abominable idea.

The conversation languished for a minute or two. Yet it was evident that both the young men were stirred, unquiet. "You came up from home," burst out the elegant one suddenly, "with something good? Where is it?"

It was astounding, it was shocking, this harping upon food. Not that he didn't himself appreciate a good square meal. But these poor devils . . . It was obvious that the stories that had come through to Midrans regarding hunger in the cities were short of the truth.

"They looked so hungry in the train. I left it for them. I changed carriages."

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A spasm of anger passed across the face of the elegant one. "*Zum Teufel holen!*" he swore. "What did you do that for?"

"I didn't realize ——"

"But of course they'll be sending you something soon? Your *Liebesgaben Paket!* Your Love-Gift Packet!"

The studious one shut up his textbook.

"They can send you one weekly, weighing up to two kilos!" he said with precision.

Hugo had not thought about it. Why shouldn't they?

"Why shouldn't they?" were his precise words.

"Why shouldn't they?" the two others screamed. Were the two young men a little mad?

"But they will!" the elegant one insisted.

"I suppose so!"

"They will! They will!" he cried.

"They will!" said Hugo. He did not dare to doubt it, so urgently the eyes of the others entreated him. Or entreated his mother, rather; and Fanni.

"*Brav! Brav!*" they applauded.

"Oh, yes!" said Hugo. They had quickened his imagination. "There are not many women in Midrans who can cook so well as my mother."

"Yes?" they inquired eagerly.

"You should try her *Mohnkrapfen!*"

"Would they travel?"

"The *Schweinsbraten* yesterday, the roast pork, was like . . . was like . . ." Words failed him.

"What fruit-trees have you?"

"Some apples and pears. And a great tall cherry."

"And she makes cake?"

"But cake. Of course. And tart."

"Cake," said the studious one. "And tart."

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"You should try her Zelten at Christmas."

The two Innsbruckers were fallen into a state of enchantment. Their voices were drowsy and monotonous. The spell extended itself to Hugo.

"Zelten, with walnuts and raisins?"

"Oh yes, and figs and pears and hazel-nuts and ——"

The shriek of an approaching train cut short the list.

"That must be the train for Augsburg," said the elegant one. "We are expecting a friend, another student. Tell me, sir, what is your name?"

Hugo was not insensitive to the "sir."

"Hugo Harpf."

"Mine is Heinrich Finger."

"And mine," exclaimed the other anxiously, "is Wilhelm Schranz."

"Where are you staying, Herr Harpf?"

"I don't know. That's just what I was going ——"

"You don't know? Capital! Oh, *prachtvoll*! You must come to Frau Pfaffenheim with us. That's where we're all going — our friend from Augsburg, too. I know she's got room. We'll *make* room!"

"We'll make room," said Herr Schranz.

"I've got money," said Hugo.

"Oh please, please," objected Herr Finger. "We'll pick up Stiegler and go at once."

Hugo blushed with pleasure at all this amiability. "Most friendly of you," he stammered.

"Not at all, not at all! I'll just cut along and find Stiegler. Will you wait — you and Willi?"

They waited. They waited for quite a long time. At last Finger returned, looking rather cross.

"Oh, Stiegler's dead," he growled. "He's dead of starvation."

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Which, in point of fact, happened to be true. But it was no feat of divination on Finger's part. It was merely fairly likely, at that period, that a person who did not keep an appointment, might be dead of starvation, or at least some malady definitely assignable to starvation.

"To Frau Pfaffenheim's," commanded Heinrich Finger.

The young men adjusted their straps to their shoulders.

"Permit me!" bade Finger, helping Hugo with the left strap.

"And me!" echoed Schranz, helping with the right.

"Thank you! Thank you! No, you are too friendly. Oh, *bitte!*"

4

Frau Pfaffenheim's establishment was situated in the drab southern suburb of Sendling, a region islanded by three railway-lines. It was a tall house in the Oberländerstrasse, which may have seen better days; but it was a distinct social drop from the neo-classical temple occupied by the mysterious Frau Kieltrunk. Frau Pfaffenheim lost no time in demonstrating the advantage of lying at the mid-point between three railway-lines, which their engineers had so designed, it seemed, as to make the house in the Oberländerstrasse the focal point for the æsthetic and intellectual amenities of Munich. Yet the gentle lady had not left Hugo alone for more than five minutes before he felt these same railway-lines close round upon him like iron clamps. If he felt homesick for Midrans before, a certain terror possessed him now. He conceived the trains hurtling hither and thither on their clangorous triangle, leaving him no point of egress. He was a prisoner. He choked for breath.

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But Frau Pfaffenheim must not be imagined as taking Hugo immediately to her bosom, and without more ado conferring amiable small-talk upon him regarding the convenience of living between three railway-lines. In fact, Hugo could have sworn that when his two new friends, leaving him in the passage, had entered the lady's living-room in order to inform her of her new lodger, he had heard a shrill tongue exclaim, "*Ausgeschlossen!* Impossible! I'm full up!" Not many sentences of whispered suasion followed; a minute later, Frau Pfaffenheim appeared, swathed in smiles and a Japanese tea-gown. A dispassionate critic might have called her a raddled hag. She was lean, bony, ancient, painted, powdered, rouged.

"Welcome," she cried, flinging out both her hands. "I'll be delighted to have you. Excuse my clothes" — simpering — "I've just been running through that big aria in *Madame Butterfly*. You remember? The one that goes . . ."

She stood in the passage, the two Innsbruckers behind her, the young rustic near the door. She opened her mouth and, twisting it fantastically, emitted a hideous series of noises. They ceased suddenly. Then she bowed towards the three gentlemen in turn, and bade them follow her to their rooms.

It was all so sudden, so disconnected. What was wrong with these people — all of them? Mad? Surely they were mad!

She turned round towards Hugo, half-way up the stairs. "I adore, I just adore, Ramschlögel. But it's impossible to get cream in Munich. And there's nothing like cream for the larynx, as my dear old professor is always telling me."

She stumped on half a flight further, then turned again to shriek across Hugo's shoulders to the two young men

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behind him. "It's very lucky I got your note in time. Only half an hour later a general and his wife came in — such a dear old couple! And though of course they offered me five times as much for your room — after all, it's not for nothing they call me the 'Students' Auntie.' Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Finger politely. "*Hurens-larven!*" he murmured under his breath.

"And here you are, boys, here you are!" she wheezed at length. She flung a sort of cupboard-door open. "Just go in and make yourselves comfortable, while I take Herr Harpf up to *his* room. His room and Herr Stiegler's, I *should* say," she smirked. "You won't mind sharing? I promised it to him when he came here in the summer to see the professors. And I'm sure *he* won't mind sharing — not under the circumstances," she breathed significantly. "You'll invite *me* sometimes," she begged, hitting Hugo under the chin playfully, "when the week's Love-Gift Packet comes! This way!"

Her threadbare slippers flapped, his mountain-boots thundered, up two more flights of stairs.

"There!" she said magnificently, flinging a door open. But the effect of the gesture was spoilt a little through the fact that the door had come off its upper hinge. It lopped sideways drunkenly, and squealed. Frau Pfaffenheim was sublimely unaware of the maladjustment. She was also obviously unaware of the great splotches of damp on the walls and against the skylight. It was, on the whole, a wretched little attic — a bed, a table, a bucket and some soap-boxes being its complete furniture. She looked at Hugo grandly, her arms folded. It was as if she were a producer who had let herself go on some stupendous stage effect, and he were her grateful backer, who had left a fortune in her hands to the greater glory of art.

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But for his part he deemed the place neither mean nor grand. He noticed neither the splotches on the walls nor the bare laths on the ceiling. He had slept in crude log-huts on the mountain meadows and on mere ledges among the further precipices. He did not hear the lady warble for him the snatch of melody from *Rigoletto*, nor read the meaning of the leer in her sharp eyes. A torpor had fallen upon him, a wing had brushed his forehead with the tip of a cold feather. The pale fires of his hair must be extinguished and the blue waters drained out of his eyes. He had come to the place where the destinies of his stock must be consummated; Tages of the Etruscans, Jesus of the Christians, Hugo the poor peasant lad — doomed were they all. Whose fingers are these that close like cords about the neck? And the sky rips like torn fabric, great tongues of flame dart through the rents. The pine-trees stoop their heads, swaying slowly, slowly, from the roots. Earth heaves like water. . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Hush, Herr Hugo, dear, dear Herr Hugo, thou also, being He, shalt rise, pretty, sweet Herr Hugo. . . .

Frau Pfaffenheim had not completed the air from *Rigoletto* when she was interrupted by the sound of Hugo's head striking like a mallet against the loose door behind him. The mountain-boots slid noisily from under his knees.

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

FRAU PFAFFENHEIM did not consider Hugo's fainting fortunate from any point of view. It was not merely that she thought his interruption of her selection from *Rigoletto* a little unmannerly, or that such behaviour was hardly the way to show your gratitude to a lady who has consented to put you up in her house, without a moment's warning, at considerable personal inconvenience. She felt perturbed mainly because a young man has no right to faint for hunger when you are expecting him to provide you with an honest weekly ration of good food from the country. Your country bumpkins were the only aristocrats these days. Talented sopranos had to starve like any clerk or stone-breaker — people like herself, who would long ago have swept the boards at the opera-houses of Dresden, Prague, Vienna, if not for this foul war. But their triumph could not be long withheld anyway. It was such bad patriotism — that's what she objected to — keeping a woman like Elsa Pfaffenheim on such short commons. Coupons were all very well in their way — one egg a week! — for ordinary people. Blue coupons, yellow coupons, red coupons, white coupons! God help you! Butter *or* lard! Not both! If the stupid state could only realize that by feeding the Elsa Pfaffenheims adequately they would end the war in a month. She was perfectly willing, for her own part, to go round among all

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the dear soldiers everywhere, *even in the firing-line*, and sing to them — Wagner! That would be a partnership, Elsa Pfaffenheim and Richard Wagner!

But there you were. One ounce of butter a week, two ounces of lard a week. A hundred grammes of meat a week — *including bone*. That's what she couldn't stomach. *Including bone*. How was a woman — above all a soprano — to keep body and soul together, let alone go out and sing all among the shells and the high explosions and the dear, *dear* soldiers? A hundred grammes a week including bone!

She kicked the unconscious Hugo petulantly.

So that nowadays lucky was the person whose great-aunt's son-in-law had a cousin with a few acres of farm. There was nothing for it, even for ladies of spirit like herself, artistic ladies, nothing for it but to truckle to the louts. And at the end of twenty-four hours' wailing and caterwauling you might get as many lousy potatoes, no bigger than cherries, as would fill a tea-cup. The young man had no right to faint for hunger. She spat in his face.

It did not occur to her that perhaps he had not fainted for hunger. People were fainting for hunger at any hour of the day anywhere — excepting those fortunate commercial gentlemen (it was surprising how many they were) who didn't turn a hair at paying sixty marks for a pound of tea or a pat of butter. These lacked nothing, the Schieber, the Schleichhändler, the shovers, the crawlers. But the deserving people, the sopranos, the patriots. . . . It occurred to her that she might as well treat the young man to a douche of cold water. She couldn't be kept waiting all day till he made up his mind to get up. She walked over to the jug of chipped enamel that stood on the rickety soap-box in the corner. *En route* the gleam of light in a

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jagged chunk of looking-glass arrested her. She set herself before it and looked at her image approvingly. She did things to her hair. With the tip of a very red and furtive tongue she distributed a small blob of rouge that had thickened in the crack of her lower lip.

It was perfectly scandalous — the sort of rouge they dished out to a girl these days. The hair was not right. She pulled up one lump and pulled down another. Then she screamed. She saw another image in the mirror beside hers; the image of pale blue eyes that had looked elsewhere and were desperate, the image of yellow hair upon which a chill wind had blown, seeming to extinguish it.

“I want to eat and drink,” said Hugo. “Now!”

She did not turn round from the mirror. She laughed noiselessly.

“Yes, Herr Harpf, *freilich*. You will report yourself to the police-station, yes? Then take your identity-card to the Food-Ticket-Office. Then you will just stand in the queue with your coupons. It is all so simple, dear Herr Harpf, it is all so simple!”

2

Perhaps Frau Pfaffenheim was right. It may have been hunger, and nothing else, that brought about Hugo's collapse. The bits and ends that Hansl had hidden away in the basket were useful at the moment, but they were not a square meal. And whatever amenities were lacking in the house of Franz Harpf, good solid food was not — from the great basin of Brennsuppe on the table in the early morning with all the family's spoons ranged about it, to the great chunks of Abendbrot at night. So that, in point of fact, Hugo was never henceforth free in Munich from the persistent, inexorable ache for food. I forget. There was

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one occasion, apparently, upon which he stuffed and stuffed and stuffed the yawning void, till the sun was a titanic red-currant and his own two eyes were red-currants and the air bobbed and dazzled with red-currants and never again, till the end of his brief days, would not the spectacle of red-currants create the most violent pangs of anguish in his stomach.

It happened a good many months later, long after Frau Pfaffenheim and Heinrich Finger and Wilhelm Schranz had given up their melancholy hope that the yellow-haired stranger was to dower them with bacon and beef and cheese and lard beyond the compass of a hundred assortments of rainbow coupons. It was with an eye to different bounties that Frau Pfaffenheim now regarded Hugo, though I doubt if the lad ever perceived it. She managed from time to time in mysterious manners to acquire food-coupons not her own, and certain stocks of food licensed by no coupons. She took Hugo with her upon several excursions into the country and they crept back at dead of night with rucksacks crammed with unholy store. Once — it could not be divined where — she had obtained possession of three admirable cigars and a quantity of sewing-cotton, nothing less enviable than sewing-cotton. That was the occasion upon which, in return for her cigars and sewing-cotton, she and Hugo were allowed to take away as many red-currants as they could carry, and eat themselves sick on the spot with the same. They did not merely eat themselves sick. They ate themselves violently ill. They managed to reach the Oberländerstrasse with extreme difficulty. Hugo, of course, had many months ago put aside his interest in high art. The thigh of the Dying Gladiator and the pectoral muscles of the Apollo Belvedere were all Wurst to him, in the homely phrase of his

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people. So that his exile from high art during the next few days was not more complete than during the few days previous. But Elsa Pfaffenheim had not given up her ambitions upon *Isolde* and *Aida*, and a whole week, perforce, elapsed before she delivered her larynx, that larynx so criminally starved of the cream which would have been so good for it, of the silver notes that lodged and languished there.

I said there was only one occasion upon which he appeased his ache — that ineffable day of the red-currants. I purposely omit that evening of the miraculous supper. That was a day lifted from all the other days, a day of ecstasy, trance, exaltation. It was not a day that belonged to Munich. If it was a day of this earth at all, it was a day of Midrans, but a day of dead Midrans that had stalked forth from its tomb; perhaps a day of the antique Midrans that had not died, and now briefly stirred and sent forth a breath from between its unabated lips.

A day, perhaps, not of Midrans contemporary or antique. A day not of this earth at all. A day followed by a disease a thousand times more desperate than the mere physical racking that followed the day in the country, that all too mortal day of cigars and red-currants and sewing-cotton.

As I have said, Hugo started disappointingly in that household of the Students' Auntie in the Oberländerstrasse. He found his money, which was not much, could buy almost nothing at all; and it is possible that the ghostly climax of his sojourn in Munich might have occurred months earlier, if Finger and Schranz had not helped him through out of their own meagre rations. I suggest that that strange event whither this tale moves

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might have occurred earlier. But — always admitting that it occurred at all — it seems feasible that the faculty, the potency, whatever it is to be called, needed just this insidious and protracted siege of all its physical ramparts during the months of starvation. It might be compared, though no merely material comparison could be satisfactory, with that essential core of activity at the heart of a block of pitch-blende which only certain very special and patient processes can uncover. The starvation of Hugo, at least, was to be a patient enough process. I wish it could be said of the Herren Finger and Schranz that it was out of pure charity they shared their mite with Hugo. But there was no charity, or exceedingly little, in the matter of food during this period, in the great cities of Germany. When it became evident to those young gentlemen that nothing at all, absolutely nothing, was to be expected from Hugo, that the fabulous kitchens of Midrans were not to pour forth for them out of a lap of bucolic plenty a fat store of baked meats and smoked meats, cheeses and butter and the breasts of chicken — they became less aware of Hugo than if he were a block of wood. And thus though some months later he fell into such a condition of weakness that he might easily have died, being a caged creature, like his own Hansl, parched for the stormy waters of his homeland and the great winds.

It was not many weeks after Hugo's arrival in Munich that he had a piece of doleful news to impart to his friends. He was not certain if he could still call them friends, but he was not certain of anything that might or might not be said about city people. These Innsbruckers and Münchenerers did not fall into easy categories like the people from the valleys. Now they blew hot, now they blew cold, you could not make up your mind about them. Several

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times Heinrich Finger had positively invited him to come and take coffee with him in the Kaffeehaus, though anybody with half an eye could see that Hugo Harpf was a mere Bauer. It was stated that the coffee was made out of the wings of may-bugs, and Finger had no difficulty in extracting from the thick lees of the brew certain scaly fragments which looked unpleasantly like it. There was never any milk in it. It cost nearly a mark a cup. But Midrans was to make up for it all, Finger winked pleasantly. He recited a gastronomic litany like a priest, nudging Hugo for the responses. And then a waitress would attract the young man's attention, or some smart maiden entering the café. He would suspend his plainsong to execute a curious ritual of lifted eyebrow, erect thumb, rotating foot. He was a gallant young man.

Herr Schranz was as virtuous in his attendances at the Hochschule as Finger and Hugo were remiss at the Akademie. None the less he permitted the courting of Hugo for some weeks to interrupt his passionate devotion to the intestinal ducts, still hoping that Hugo might minister to them more crudely, but more joyously, within the course of a post or two.

But neither meat nor cheese, neither cake nor anything, was delivered in the Oberländerstrasse out of the Hesperidean pastures of Midrans. The interest of the metropolitans from Innsbruck in the existence of their provincial waned, though still from time to time they poked an inquiring head round the loose door of Hugo's attic. Nothing arrived from Midrans at all saving a brief and unscholarly note from Hugo's brother, Erich, announcing the death of their mother. Hugo, in a voice like the cry of those toneless birds who inhabit the upper screees, conveyed the information to his friends. They ex-

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pressed their regrets with such conviction that Hugo's lips trembled and he turned away abruptly. The young gentlemen promptly realized that, the good Hausfrau being dead, they need hope no more for sucking-pig and trussed chicken to be launched out of that smitten household into their gaping mouths. Hugo Harpf passed out of their sphere of interests.

It might have been thought that Hugo and Heinrich must have been brought together under the shadow of the Castor and Pollux which decorate the front of the Akademie, for the two young men, it will be remembered, were students at the same distinguished institution. But I grieve to record that it would figure as little among the preoccupations of Heinrich in Munich, as of Hugo, should some chronicler feel impelled to record them; but he, like myself, might find some consolation in the fact that Wilhelm Schranz devoted himself to his own less graceful studies with ardour enough for three. Heinrich set foot in Munich with a contempt for academies worthy of Oskar Tachezy at his most futuristic; and it seems probable that it was nothing more than the complication which had arisen between himself and a bank-manager's wife that had made him accept exile in the city of such pappy art — that, and the prospect of the waitresses of Munich, who were more numerous, if not more enchanting, than their sisters of the Mariatheresiastrasse in Innsbruck. And in their arms, to be sure, we may henceforth leave without regrets that promising young painter.

Hugo, for his part, attended the Akademie scrupulously for some weeks. He was set to draw from the antique, which he did so abominably that the professors imagined either that he was an imbecile or that he was carrying out a patient and execrable joke at their expense. The

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alternative theory was broached that not Hugo was an imbecile, but the gentleman responsible for his entrance into the Akademie. Certainly no one interpreted his complete ignorance of the elements of technique as the sure signs of heaven-born genius. For his own part, he considered the whole business as futile, cold and indecent. He could see the point in assigning Peppi to a pale-blue heaven at the moment of the Virgin Mary's Coronation. Behind her, Christ with a short pointed beard and God the Father in side-whiskers held their red robes about them with one hand each, and in the other held the crown wherewith they were crowning her. Or St. George, pike in hand, scarlet plumes streaming in air, rode his white palfrey, the mean dragon under those glorious hoofs spitting and cringing. Or, in opposed regions, sinners bubbled in cauldrons, fried in pans, roasted upon hooks, were subjected to every mode of culinary preparation to make them fit meat for their Dark Master. *That* was art. There was sense in it. But this shameless stuff repelled him. He was listless as well as incompetent. And then one day he stumbled into the life-class. He could not bring himself to think of the outrage he had beheld. But it was not the victim herself who had so appalled him, but those callous youths and girls who squinted at her coldly, measured her shame by their pencils, recorded it as if she were a shoulder of mutton. He reported the incident with burning cheeks to Heinrich Finger. That gentleman burst into such loud shrieks of laughter that the plaster fell from the wall in flakes. Hugo realized that different conventions regarding the female ruled in the Floriansthal and the Ludwigstrasse. He knew that not even Ludl Schnegg, that notorious buck, nor Rudolf Streli, the dangerous despoiler of so much virginity, could have beheld that

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open shame without a flame in their cheeks. If he had by his side no more than those two stalwarts, he would have shown them Kunst that morning. There would have been a litter of teeth on the floor. As for the young women, he would have made it clear that the sooner they got back into their kitchens the better for them — particularly with Rudolf and Ludl about. And the other one, the miserable naked one — but he shut her out of his mind painfully.

Hugo, none the less, was a young man of principle. He knew that Oskar Tachezy had sent him to Munich in order to become a great painter whose casual sketches would fetch tens of thousands of marks. He would certainly have persisted in his studies (for so long, at least, as the professors tolerated him) if Tachezy had kept his promises. Hugo had never known what it was not to fulfil a contract whether he had entered into it with some poverty-stricken old widow or one of the richest peasants in the valley. He had entered into a contract with Tachezy to be a great painter. He was ready to fulfil his side of the contract, so long as Tachezy fulfilled his. And although no one had ever had the impertinence to suggest binding Tachezy down by documents, it was understood that the captain was going to keep Hugo going in Munich by a small but discreet monthly allowance. Old Harpf had arranged to shorten it to the limits of indiscretion, as he had already done with Tachezy's first subsidy. But neither Hugo nor anybody else doubted that he could eke it out quite easily by practising his craft in Munich.

Several weeks passed without a word from Tachezy. Hugo thereon addressed him a reminder of his existence. He was much too modest to remind him of anything else. There was no reply from Tachezy, but a note came from Erich informing him that Frau Harpf was dead. For the

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next few weeks Hugo had no thought for the Hungarian; but when at last the numb pain eased, and he found himself without a farthing in his pockets, and hunger became clamorous in him from day to day and hour to hour, he wrote once more to Tachezy. He addressed a note to Fanni, too, remembering that the captain had been so attentive towards her. But it was from his sweetheart, Nanni, he heard finally that the Tachezys had left the village many weeks ago, no one knew for what place. As for Fanni, she walked about like one dumb and blind. She had been in that condition since Tachezy left Midrans. The death of her mother had hardly seemed to make any difference. She worked, of course, like a cart-horse, like a blinkered horse, rather, in a mill, treading a blind round endlessly.

Nanni did not use these images. She was no scholar; neither was Hugo. But she conveyed her meanings. The writing of letters was not one of the arts cultivated by Midransers; it did not belong even to the code of lovers. Letters were as rare and portentous among those people as they must have been everywhere among simple people before the age of postal systems and printing. If lovers for some reason left Midrans, sooner or later they returned. There was no interchange of crosses for kisses and the formulas of epistolary love. It did not distress Hugo that, so far as letters could remove it, Midrans was as far removed from him in snow and silence as the Arctic Sea. Midrans would be Midrans still, and Nanni Tratzl his bright-eyed sweet, when he was home again.

But he was hungry. Hansl too was hungry. There was matter for sad thought. In the early months, even during that bleak winter which somehow, in Munich, seemed so much more intolerable than the clear rigours of Midrans,

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Hansl remained more or less contented. The authorities issued no coupons for Hansl, but there were occasions when Hansl showed himself worth his weight in coupons. It would be wrong to call Hugo dishonest, but I admit that, with respect to the behaviour of Hansl, his conscience became shamelessly insensitive. Hansl reached heights of kleptoscopy never attained by raven before. His career in Midrans had not been unspotted, but in Munich it became as black as his wings. The only thing that can be adduced in his extenuation is that there was such virtuosity in his burglaries that it ceased to be a moral failing and became a pure art — the only art which interested his master during the whole of this period. He seemed to take as much interest as any human in the *Oberländerstrasse* in the Friday newspaper; for Friday was the great day when the food controller announced that some special luxury was to be added to the ration during the course of the coming week — a salt herring, it might be, a small quantity of Sauerkraut or (of less interest to Hugo) a little sewing-cotton. On the other hand he seemed to share the general depression when the same gentleman announced that, so far from adding a salt herring to the week's bounties, he was reluctantly compelled to drop the jam or cereal or sugar ration from a hundred to sixty grammes.

Hansl did not honour Frau Pfaffenheim with his attentions; for when he had once condescended to share some wretched offal with her cat, she had deluged him with a kettle of boiling water, being a gentle lady, but subject to ungovernable passions. The Herren Finger and Schranz were not worth much attention either; Finger usually devoured his ration in the company of some charmer, Schranz locked up even his fragments of potato-peel, for they were quite worth chewing when the juicier kernel

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was lacking. Hansl's field of operations was more extensive. He took up his stand on the skylight in Hugo's ceiling and wove a wide web which encircled all the roofs and areas of the Oberländerstrasse, and on nights of great darkness and urgency, extended to the far bourne of the Alramstrasse. He knew more intimately than any policeman what ladies were visited by what gentlemen, and what gifts they left behind them. Some left no more than money upon mantel-pieces; others left store of extra-rational foods; some left coupons. These gentlemen visited these ladies more or less overtly. There were other gentlemen, of lesser social pretensions, who crept in furtively but went no further than the passage, drawing swiftly from their rucksack a lurid staff of sausage, a phosphorescent mackerel, and then departed swiftly, having pocketed great guerdon.

None knew more certainly than Hansl the goings and comings of these people; and though the aboriginal cats of the neighbourhood resented, and rightly resented, the operations of Hansl, and attempted to expostulate with him with tooth and claw, the degenerate and disheartened creatures soon learned they were no match for him. Flesh torn from this cat's spine, eyeball torn from this cat's socket, impressed upon their whole community that something uncanny was descended upon them out of those mountains engraved upon the frosty air southward. His operations were not disturbed physically, but when they saw him lurching down this chimney, or scrabbling out of this cellar-window, they raised a more lugubrious howl than ever brought feline maiden forth from secret bower. So that not without a little pride, if, alas, with no shame, Hansl laid upon his master's bare table this offering of herring's tail, this other of raw onion.

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Throughout the winter Hansl kept himself in trim. But perversely, when spring came, he drooped. For Hansl the spring in a city was but the phantom of a spring, even as the triumph of the central countries during those same months was but the phantom of a triumph. There was no sense of rising sap in trees, of buds bursting their sheaths and cracking into flower, of young and gawky beasts crying for their dams. There was no spring in this stone wilderness, which was more waste than the flayed ribs of mountains where not a grass-blade lodged. Hansl drooped. The light went out of his eyes, his croak became inert like the creak of a piece of rusty mechanism. The gloss went out of his feathers, till he looked dead as soot. Food did not revive him, though Hugo pressed upon him his whole ration, when he had money enough to buy it. For Hansl, and for Hansl only — not for himself, nor for anybody, till many months had passed by — did he attempt to exercise his ineffable faculty, after his discovery that he possessed it, or that he was possessed by it. But Hansl was beyond the scope of miracle. All living creatures that were not human, Hugo was to find, were beyond the scope of miracle. Hansl did not revive. He was dying.

And in that measure, his master, too, was dying. His yellow hair was sere. His blue eyes were grey as the stone streets. Hugo was dying.

Yet no lack of kindness must be imputed to Frau Pfaffenheim, a woman of some nobility. For despite all the hardships of this last period of the war, she never renounced her ambition to sing some day in grand opera. She knew that this was a region full of pitfalls for the virtuous, but she had decided to risk them, her love for her art was so selfless. The essential laryngitic milk and cream were still withheld from her by that ordinance

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which declared that only children, and such invalids as were armed by a doctor's certificate, were to receive a minute trickle. Hugo Harpf, too, had disappointed her. None the less, she was not discouraged. She practised eloquent and protracted deaths by the hour, avowals of her love and protestations of green jealousy; and frequently, apologizing for the acoustics of the place, she invited Hugo into her kitchen to listen to her. At first he was humbly grateful, for she often had a fire in the large tiled range which occupied more than half of the narrow room. But he began to develop such a horror of her twisting lips, the taut tendons of her scraggy throat, and her eyes, her horrible amorous eyes, that it seemed to him the blue caverns of the innermost glaciers were more comfortable than this compact stew. She managed, like everybody else in Munich, to add an occasional furtive dainty to her ration — a loaf of edible bread, or an egg, or a Wurstel. It did not occur to her to share these grosser joys with Hugo, though she had more than once offered him a piece of dried swede when she was sucking one herself. She moved her chaps fantastically and made noises in her teeth. His very horror kept him rooted. He could not move his eyes from hers. They spent several agreeable evenings once, slicing a load of swedes and drying them in the oven; and when, some time later, she found the slices were going rotten in the cellar, she generously invited him to help himself. No lack of kindness, I repeat, must be imputed to Frau Pfaffenheim.

What then detained Hugo in the Oberländerstrasse? If so great a sickness for home was upon him and upon his raven, why did he not set rucksack upon shoulders and Hansl into basket, and make for the mountains southward, that seemed so close sometimes that he needed only

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to set forth at dawn to be treading gentian that same evening? A complex of reasons aggravated his lassitude. There was the railway fare; but had the idea of return presented itself at all powerfully, he would have remembered his feet then, as he remembered them later. Heinrich Finger had, moreover, impressed upon him the fact that Austrians in Germany were called up for the army two months later than in their own country. And he felt vaguely that it might be useful to profit by these two months. A soldier he must be soon enough, like Franzl and Alois, like Johann, the elder brother of Peppi Ganner, like that lusty poacher, Erich Zeiler, like those who were dead and those others who had come back maimed. He had no fear of being a soldier. The War seemed to him now, as always, a black business of spells and enchantments, outside knowledge or hope or fear. Sooner or later you too entered within the scope of its spells. The War maintained itself outside that sphere of consciousness in which he was aware of long queues of women waiting outside shops for the morsels which must invariably be exhausted before their own turn came; in which he was aware of sudden ugly riots and women shrieking that this meat served out to them was rats and mice; in which he was aware of those more calm but more awful voices, muttering: "*Die da Oben. Die da Oben.* They shall pay. They shall pay!"

Hugo himself was part and parcel of all this. All this was not the War. He must profit by those two months of absolution from it, to show them . . . to do . . . To do what? To show them what? He had no idea. He merely knew that it would be bitter beyond words to go back home, empty, useless, to skulk about in Midrans for a few weeks or a few months, and then disappear into darkness.

He would bring no paintings for which Milan and Paris

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would compete, bidding thousands of lire and francs against each other. He had no rancour against Tachezy, for there was something of the stoical philosopher in him. He knew that that person had passed as completely out of his life as an empty bottle carried down a river. He had not sufficient pathological knowledge to expound to himself why Tachezy had thought fit to divert a young stranger's life so wantonly. But he saw how useless it was, and he felt himself too feeble, to hate Tachezy. Tachezy existed no longer.

No paintings for Paris or Milan; no shawls, no kerchiefs, no pretty brooch set with his own name, no ring, for Nanni. He could not go home until somehow, somewhere, he had done something for Nanni, shown her with some fairing how he loved her, because her eyes danced, and her skin was like guelder-roses and her mouth was like flowers of the mountain meadows. But how to find Nanni a fairing? They commissioned no peasant in Munich, when folk died, to depict the joys of the fortunate in Heaven and to beg a prayer from the passer-by that the newly-dead might the more quickly attain them. The fronts of the tall stone houses were dead as tombstones. It was not the fancy of these people to enliven them with Lawrence frying upon his grill, or Ursula accompanied by maidens.

Hugo must pursue other tasks to find Nanni a fairing. He found it more than difficult to earn himself bread. There was no demand for his carved Christs. Now and again he made a few marks by blackleading stoves, by painting the metal parts of oil-lamps, by binding the hairs of brushes in brush-factories. He still retained the status of student, and had to report himself to the Arbeits-Amt. Here a ticket was given him and he was requested

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to be in readiness to go on munitions, when he was called. He was called duly. They set him to polishing grenades in the Krupp factory, and it was while he was engaged upon this occupation that he collapsed utterly; for the stubstitute-foods, and the lack even of these, had told considerably more upon his constitution, suddenly thrust among these conditions, than upon those others, the city people, on whom these conditions had been forced slowly, and who had acquired some measure of resistance to them. He collapsed and fell forward on to his bench, striking his forehead on one of the grenades ranged before him. He found himself ultimately in his attic in the Oberländerstrasse, though it was not likely he was taken there. There was no time in the Krupp factory to attend to people who collapsed upon their benches. They collapsed too frequently.

3

It remains a speculation how Hugo got home and in what state of consciousness. For many hours, and it may have been for some days, the room he lay in was inhabited by phantasmagoria. The room itself at one moment thrust back its walls for leagues upon leagues, extending its ceiling upwards till mountain-peaks and sky grappled, forcing its floor downwards till the roots of ancient trees wound themselves about the world's basic rock. The next moment walls and ceiling and floor advanced upon his trestle-bed, till he lay between them as in a coffin. But howsoever vast or meagre his breathing-space, there was always room for the ghosts to enter and stoop over him and pass further. It was Nanni now who touched his forehead, then betook herself to the door of her alp-hut. There

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she wavered, dancing, and the branches of all the trees were hung with curious instruments that uttered music to her movements, though neither hand nor wind touched them. Then down came Ludl Schnegg's fist on his forehead. Spy on me, Hugo, wouldst thou? But I did not know, Ludl, thou hadst brought her here. How should I know? But if thou desirest to fight, Ludl, just tell her to get behind that tree. I'll dig thy eye out, Ludl. I'll dig thy eye out. To-morrow, Hugo, thou art a sick man to-day. And it was not Ludl Schnegg at all. How could he have mistaken old Julia? She was talking to the Christ on the pass over into the Emmsthal. The Christ was talking to her. Bid them beware, Julia, my enemy is upon me. He is about to be loosened. Thou understandest, Julia? What business had Julia before dawn on the cold pass talking to hacked wood? It was not Julia. How could it be? Here was she watching in a house. A house up the hill.

*Franz Harpf's Heim
Klein — aber mein.*

This was the house also of Hugo Harpf. Where was Hugo? Hugo had candles about him, tall candles, and Julia was telling her beads. Hugo was dead. Hugo was dead.

Hugo was not dead. Hugo was merely dying. He was dying for hunger. It was Hugo's mother who was dead and there had been no Hugo to follow behind her to her grave in the windy yard. If she were not dead Hugo would not be hungry. How savoury was the Brennsuppe in the morning, steaming upon the bare scrubbed table! And at night, when Alois came in from the forest and Franzl from putting the cows to stall, and the old man

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from some wayside chapel he had been renewing, and fat little Ludl had brought in the goats, and himself had come in from giving old Wildhauer's barn a second coat of whitewash, and the younger ones were in bed by now — the dumplings she set before them in the great tureen and the pale mountain of heaped Kraut! But she was dead now and they were all hungry.

No, Franzl was a soldier and Alois was a soldier. Where were they? What had happened to them? Hugo would never be a soldier. He was dying.

Hansl was dying.

His eyes were open now, they were too feeble even for mirage. Hansl's beak was in his bosom. There was no strength in Hansl, excepting in his talons, clasped rigidly about the stick Hugo had once nailed for him on the edge of the table. He was aware of Hansl, the table, the skylight, the fragment of mirror, the soap-box with the basin upon it, the bed he lay on — he was aware of all these with his eyes. With every other mode of awareness, all his organs, his blood, his mind, his soul, he was aware of his hunger. In the hours that followed, if they were hours, if the state that followed is amenable at all to the common resolutions of time — these modes of awareness presented hunger to him in all the varieties under which the human creature is susceptible to it. He was aware of it as something protracted, insidious, enormous, like a tide; as something short, sharp, furious, like a storm. It was a thudding in his ears, a flickering in his eyes. It was a grief, an ecstasy.

And then a state supervened upon these successive and coinciding modes of awareness — something infinitely more quiet, more earnest. With a power mobilized he knew not whence, a power that was to impel him he knew not

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whither, his will was in function now. He was conceiving out of barrenness, substance. He had a power to ingermine the withered womb of air. The odour of food was in his nostrils, strong wine, warm bread. The table creaked with plenty. He staggered from his trestle-bed and devoured the food of miracle—he and Tages of the Etruscans, he and Jesus of the Christians, they broke their flesh for bread and drank their blood for wine.

But his ears were sealed and his eyes were blinded to all things outside the fabric of miracle. As he ate and drank, he was not aware of his raven that had opened wide eyes like human eyes; of each separate feather upon the bird's starved body standing out like stalks. He was not aware of the bird uttering such sounds as that hoarse throat had never uttered before, a croak of such dismay and terror that it was more like a human shrieking than a bird that croaked. He did not see how the raven sprang from its perch and hurled itself wildly from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, bruising its wings, its beak, its claws. The horror that was upon the creature blinded it to the gap between the skylight and ceiling whence it had issued so often before. Hugo was not aware of the stunned bird lying with head awry beside the bed. He was aware only that he was the master of miracle, and the bread was still warm out of its phantasmal ovens. Not anywhere in Midrans was a wine so strong as this. His head fell upon his breast and he slept.

CHAPTER NINE

HUGO awoke. A day passed, and another day. He went out again into the white credible world. He returned to his attic that day and the next day. It is not easy to explain why he lingered, how he could permit himself not to set Hansl into his basket as before, and make for the mountain forests with him, for that high air which was their element, for lack of which the creature was dwindling, was dying visibly. There was a sense in which Hugo loved Hansl more than he had ever loved his dead mother or could ever love the living Nanni Tratzl. It was a love rarer than the umbilical or procreational passions that bound him to those two women, a thread woven out of midnight, a cord stouter than the bole of an oak-tree. Yet Hansl was dying. Hugo lingered in Munich.

It was not because Wilhelm Schranz, a young man not wholly so self-absorbed as he had seemed, came in some mornings later and announced that there was a profitable opening for him in a stained-glass factory, which, of all irrelevant institutions, had lately relit its furnaces. That was not the reason, for Hugo made no effort to avail himself of the opportunity. And yet how else might he achieve a fairing for his sweetheart? Hugo smiled wanly; but he knew the terror was in his eyes, the same terror as he had beheld when he had lifted his head from the rickety table and found his way at length to the lump of mirror and gazed there, wondering who he might be who gazed. Hugo smiled wanly. There were fairings for sweethearts, if need was.

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Why then did he linger? Is it possible that already the change had begun in his moral nature, which later seemed to be so subtly disintegrated, to be racked with so strange a sickness? How is it possible, on the other hand, that the change had *not* already begun? Yet it seems impossible to include Hansl within the scope of any transformation effected within the spiritual or mental nature of his master. No. Even to the very end, even to the time of Hugo upright and dead in the sepulchre, Hugo was still, for Hansl, the small boy lost in the clearing with a sudden glint of sunshine enkindling his yellow hair; Hansl was still the elect affinity of that small boy, being not a woman, nor a dog, nor a friend, nor a river, nor a horse, being only of all things in earth and heaven a raven with sheeny feathers and unfathomable eyes.

I am driven to the conclusion then, that for the several weeks that followed the first miracle, Hugo was hardly aware of Hansl at all, perhaps even less aware of him than in the first years of his existence, before Hansl, giving the whole forest and the whole atmosphere wings, lurched down upon his shoulder. He was not aware of Hansl. He was aware only of the bleak room in which the thing had taken place. He could not absolve himself from the room. The unsteady table was an altar like the altar whereon a priest has set the sacred species. He was a priest himself who does not know if he loves or hates the faith into which greater influences than his own spirit have borne him, and not knowing if he loves or hates it, knows well enough how fearful it is to him. He fell upon a profound nausea. He saw no bottom to the precipices on the brim of which he stood, tottering. All the seven heavens were comprehended in his jagged piece of mirror. The oceans were compounded into the three inches of water in his tin

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basin. He descended the noisome stairs and went into the street. He ventured beyond the three lines of railway which islanded that region of the city. But he returned again, as a monk to his cell, a priest to his altar.

So many days passed by, until he was aware again of Hansl. He perceived in that moment that if Hansl had not clung to life and to his master with something of the dumb tenacity of those boulders and iron-rooted trees among which he was born, there was no saying how many days ago there might have fallen to his feet a chill lump of feathered clay, with glass for eyes.

He thrust into his rucksack those few rags that were still left to him and made Hansl's basket into a soft and warm nest. So he made for the southward mountains and his own land. He heard the voice of the Sturmbach hurtling down towards Midrans. They had not yet knocked off work at old Wildhauer's. He heard the whine of the sawmill quite plainly.

CHAPTER TEN

I

IT was a stranger tale than any the Moor had to impart to his examiners that I gleaned in my corner of the Bauernstube—the Public Bar, as it were—of the White Lamb. The portance of the travels' history achieved by the peasant lad and his raven moved not less formidably between antres vast and desarts idle. Nor was there any lack in that landscape of rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touched heaven. I have said earlier that the tale of Hugo moved upon two planes, which might be defined as the canonical and the apocryphal; and it is upon the second plane that Hugo's journey teems with Cannibals that each other ate, and anthropophagi and men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders. Such was their general character and awe, but their particular lineaments and abominations were drawn from the leaves of that colossal picture-book which Hugo Harpf himself, and his father, and his ancestors, had executed, and the legion of painters and carvers among that peasantry.

But for me a less fearsome figure emerges out of those mists of apocrypha. As he stolidly trudges down the valleys and up the passes, he is a figure hardly to be distinguished from the hosts of young artisans who before the war wandered from town to town and gave a day's work in exchange for their supper and a night's lodging. Their hosts were more numerous after the war and they overflowed every frontier excepting the French. They

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were to be encountered anywhere between Christiania and Palermo, but their character had changed. They carried guitars or sketch-books. They called themselves not artisans now, but artists.

Hugo Harpf was an unassuming young man. For a crust of bread and a mug of wine, it was a matter of indifference to him whether he hacked a tree or painted a picture. The first duty was demanded from him frequently, the second, in fact, only once, towards the end of his journey. He had crossed the Bavarian frontier over against that trackless massif of grey limestone called the Karwendel-Gebirge, where once more, as I shall narrate shortly, the need fell upon him to summon his demon. Hollow-cheeked and desolate, he managed at length to extricate himself from Karwendel, and, diverted by pure chance to follow a certain stream out of a hundred streams, he came out upon the small town of Hall in the Inn Valley. The warm lights in the upper chamber of an inn lured him. He climbed the stairs unsteadily, pushed a door open and found himself in a room which might have seemed transported bodily out of his Akademie in Munich, where he had so signally failed to make of himself a Holbein or a Dürer. The walls of the room — which to this day has some fame in that region as the “Künstler-Stuberl” — were chock-a-block with oil-paintings, pastels, charcoal-drawings. They were a mournful residuum of its boisterous and bearded clientele that were gathered to discuss high art that evening about the long table and the stoups of beer; but they did not look unkindly on Hugo as he staggered in. Imperceptibly the dissolution of armies was already beginning. Searching questions were not put to wandering young men. Someone asked him — facetiously, I suppose — whether he too was a Künstler. “*Ja wohl!*”

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he replied timidly. He had just come from Munich, from the Akademie. The inquirer, having two eyes in his head, perceived that the stranger was faint for lack of food. That was not the sole cause of his faintness; but it might have been, to judge from the voracity with which he attacked the chunk of bread and the cube of Schweinsbraten that were set before him. Then he was provided with a piece of charcoal and a block of paper. He was aware of the responsibility of being an artist among artists. It was not enough to render for these august gentlemen Peppi spurting blood as a tree fell on him, and his subsequent compensations in Heaven. He attempted to reproduce from memory the plaster cast of a Zeus he had wrestled with in Munich. (You may see his effort for yourself in the wall to the right of the window as you enter the Künstler-Stuberl.) He did not declare his pagan intentions, and it was deemed a passable rendering of God the Father. A later hand has set a triangular halo against the venerable head, lest it should be taken for the head of Moses, the Jew. The bucolic signature of Hugo Harpf may be discerned in the left-hand bottom corner of the picture.

But this episode occurred towards the latter end of his journey. He still had many leagues to cover before he might behold the farthest outlying spurs of his own country, the Schlammsthal and the Floriansthal. But these people, at least, spoke his own vernacular and thought his thoughts. On his earlier slow progress southward from Munich towards the hills that stand up about the Walchensee and the ridges that guard the Isar Valley, food was not to be come by for the rendering of a Zeus that might be mistaken for a God the Father. For days at a time he walked hungry, saving for what wild food might

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be gleaned from tree or bush or the rare nest of a mountain bird whither Hans unfailingly brought him. It took Hans no long time to be Hans again. He opened his wings against the forests and the hill-tops; and these came down upon him, encircled him, held him aloft, tossing with glad cries on their wooden and rocky waves.

In the villages they were niggardly and suspicious. It might be a literal crust of bread they gave him for half a day's work, so that before he had accumulated a tolerable meal in the yawning vacancy of his rucksack, he had knocked at every door and been cursed at most.

He knew that the power was in him to set apples and cherries to dangle from bare thorns and to heap naked rock with steaming plenty. But so extreme a fear of that same power was upon him that he pressed both hands before his eyes, lest, when he became too conscious of it, it should take easy shape before him. Hansl, at least, was well. So he trudged on through soundless pine forests where the whole earth quaked like a jelly under him, with the generations of trees that were fallen, rotted and entombed. He came out upon slanting scree and cups of crushed gravel that went roaring valleywards at a whisper. He made his bed under the eaves of rocks and found at his head the dry small bones of hares and rabbits that a vulture a century or two centuries ago had picked clean. He kept his demon at arm's length, but at arm's length only. Never might wider distances separate them again till each were fulfilled of the other, and their joint essence were released once more to await for five thousand or fifty thousand years the lamentable soul appointed for their inhabitation.

It was because Hugo desired to avoid the small frontier town of Scharnitz, where difficulties were certain to arise,

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that he turned south-eastward into Karwendel. There is no region in the Eastern Alps so vast and lonely, overhung by such cloudy precipices, strewn with such a bitter spilth of ruin. The days passed. In other seasons Hugo might have met among these fastnesses the legal or the illegal slayer of chamois, a furtive peasant anxious for the pickings of such legal or illegal slayings. But the sportsmen and the poachers were occupied with other quarry. There was no path that did not end at length in a platform slung over the blue void, or after illusory downward twistings did not return into ice and cloud. He knew he must yield. He ate. He drank. For days thereafter, with a glaze upon his eyes and a sweat on his temples, he mooned about among the caves. A fountain dripping out of the dark roof acquired more than the noise of water. It beat into the basin below it like a drumstick on a drum, regularly, like a tattoo in a jungle. Or it would suddenly interrupt its insensate rhythm and hurtle jaggedly against the walls like a thunderclap among the split hills. And Hansl hid his beak in his bosom, perched in a cleft some yards away, and would not lift his head. But Hugo knew that the thing had come with more ease than before, when he had uttered the summons in the attic in Munich. He knew also that it had left him with less woe. He knew now that if he, Hugo the master, so desired, there was no marvel that might not be achieved, and this day or the next or the next, it might be achieved as simply as his eyes saw and his pulses beat. It was this knowledge that was upon him like a sickness rather than the strange sickness itself that he had earlier experienced. Till the pale burning of his eyes once more thrust through the glaze that arrested it and he switched the straps of his rucksack over his shoulders and he walked forth at the rising of the sun, and Hansl



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came over with a low cry and perched upon his shoulder again.

So it was that, directed by pure chance to follow a certain stream out of a hundred streams, he came out upon the small town of Hall in the Inn Valley. I need not follow the tale of his going home in further detail. Steinegg he reached at night and saw the hills of his home valleys lifted clear into moonlight. He snuggled into a hay-hut and the scent was the breath of his sweetheart. There was a subdued trickle of water over stones. It was her voice. He rose clear-eyed, the lad he had been in the pastures of Midrans, square-shouldered, trudging bravely the long road into Schlamms. He arrived at Schlamms with the moon's arrival over the eastern tops. He was in his own land again. Here were the cliffs that held the road into Florian's Valley. He did not entertain for more than a moment the thought of asking for shelter at one or other of the inns, though he had tramped all day long. The landlords, to be sure, were his friends. He, or his father, or his father's father, had painted for the Golden Cross a motto, for the Star a saint; because the prowess of the Harpfs had gone beyond the limits of the Floriansthal and miles away down the valley beyond Schlamms itself. But it should be with another and a gentler creature than the landlord of any inn he would first have speech, among the people of his own land. No other lips than Nanni's should be the first to greet him, for there were none lovelier in any huge city or minute village. And her lips should be stilled with kisses before they had time for speech.

He was young. He was strong. The hungry city was a lie, a nightmare. There was no truth other than the red cheeks of Nanni and her dancing eyes. She was asleep in her alp-hut now, high over Midrans. He would step forth

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obliquely over the hills. The moonlight and his heart would guide him by the perilous places. He needed no moonlight. His heart would lead him right though his eyes were bound round with a kerchief. He would arrive in time for her awakening; or if he arrived sooner, he would tuck himself away for half an hour or an hour into the log-hut where he had slept so often before. He set forth into the Floriansthal, and felt his limbs stout as oak branches and supple as willow saplings. In two hours he reached the point where the short track over the mountains debouched upon the right-hand side of the valley above the shrine of St. Anthony. He could not remember that he had ever reached the shrine in two and a half hours, or even in three. He swung upward joyously into the higher moonlight and the more exquisite silence. He skirted the silver-drenched precipices, held to the gaunt ridges, flung himself into deep ravines, came to the heights again, slapping with his brow the strong tide of moonlight. But when at length he saw Nanni's steading stand out so lovely and tiny beyond enormous acres of air, the moonlight was not strong. He wondered for a moment was it all mere hallucination — Nanni's hut, the two sheds beyond the yard, the log-cabin beyond the meadow? Was it hallucination? Or were they dimmed because a mist was on his eyes? He, Hugo, crying? Seeing that no thought could be more farcical than that Hugo Harpf should be crying, he perceived that the moonlight was not strong, the alp was not clear, because dawnlight had arisen to dispute the heights. He sniffed tremulously, like a dog. Here was day surely. He marched down upon the place of his beloved.

The hillside dipped for half a hundred yards under his feet and rose again. It seemed to him no more than a

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ripple in water that a swallow skims. Between the further ridge of the hill and the small cluster of buildings the tongue of a wood extended, thrust out from the dark bulk of trees that climbed the mountain rearward from Nanni's hut. He seemed to thrust the trees from his path as if they were woven out of gossamer. They lay behind him in swathes. He reached the fringe of the wood at the moment the sun crested the great knot of icy humps to the east whence the glacier thrust its snout out of the limestone kennel it had hacked for itself. The trees that had fallen behind him swung upright again, with a hiss like flames. The flowers that had wilted overnight caught fire. The lad stretched out his arms towards his sweetheart — a tired sweetheart she must be that was still abed and it was morning. He stretched his arms out towards her laughter, her candour, turning his back upon the swarthy miracle that the darkness had engendered, the months of darkness that clove Midrans from Midrans.

She had worked late and long, little Nanni. So much milk she feared it would go sour before she could churn it? Or had she been distilling, late into the night, against his home-coming, the essences of gentian and alpine rose? There was a heavy dew on the pasture. He would crawl into his own little log-hut as of old, for half an hour at most. He would hear her stirring twenty minutes sooner. He took a step towards the hut.

In the low hole cut square out of the logs above the ground, which was all the door the hut boasted, the head of a man appeared. His body followed, long and supple. The man stooped for a hat somewhere within the hut, the hat of a man from the cities. The man rubbed his eyes, yawned.

"A thief!" a voice cried reassuringly in Hugo's heart.

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"Praised be Jesus that I am here! A poacher! Or is it not Nanni herself but some other that he ——"

The man answered the question. "Nanni!" he shouted. "Lazy-bones!"

There was a reply from within Nanni's hut — certain unintelligible words. "Coming!" their purport was. "A moment, my sweet!"

That was a mistake surely. Some other Nanni? Hugo stepped back beyond the edge of the wood. The trees seemed no longer to soar about his ears like plumes of flame. They nodded rather, they sagged, like the plumes on the heads of funeral horses.

Who else was this who came forth from the hut than Nanni Tratzl — his own little Nanni? Her cheeks smoother than any apples, her hair glossier than any chestnuts. Nanni — for whom magic was to be forsworn, for there was no magic like Nanni's in the caverns of the mountains or the caverns of the sea.

The man came towards her swiftly over the glinting meadow. Each grass-blade was a splinter of metal, but he walked not the less firmly, treading down the grass-blades and the wild flowers, pansies and moon-daisies, sorrel and the trickle of king-cup that lined a secret rivulet, guessed at rather than audible. He trod them all down.

"Conrad!" she cried. She ran over towards him prettily. She offered her lips — which were pansies and moon-daisies and king-cup and sorrel. The man lifted her from the ground, to the height of his thin mouth. Then he bent down towards her and fastidiously, with practised art and sequence, kissed this eyebrow and the other eyebrow, the eyelids, the small mouth again.

Conrad von Felsenburg, that tall man and dark, with the high nose slightly misshaped, and eyes thrust deep into

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concave sockets, the last of that race of robbers, that for so many centuries had rifled the virginity of lands and maidens.

"*Böser Bua!*" she said to him prettily. "Wicked lad! Hold thy hand out!"

A memory struck Hugo between the temples. He heard the bells tolling in the belfries. They were carrying old Wildhauer to his grave on the hill. Two by two the men and women walked, the lads and maidens. Behind the mourners walked, in his ineffable condescension, the lord of Midrans. . . .

He had slain a man of the Harpfs, robber that he was and murderer. This was a hundred years ago. To-day from another Harpf he stole the lovely maiden, the bright-eyed one, that had made the high mountains easier to scale than hummocks, and all the hungry anguish of the city worth enduring a thousand times and again if it might buy a ribbon for her hair, her stolen treacherous hair.

"Give me thy hand, I say!"

Conrad von Felsenburg held out his delicate white hand to her, whiter than her own. She slapped it as Sister Teresa, the schoolmistress of Midrans, had often enough slapped the hand of Nanni Tratzl.

Not often enough, Sister Teresa! And, oh! calm daughter of God, were it not better you had hacked it from the wrist?

He had slain a man of the Harpfs a hundred years ago. Should not a man of the Harpfs slay him this day, this moment? A pulse drummed in Hugo's throat. Talons sprouted upon his finger-tips. His lips upon her eyebrows now, upon her eyelids, now upon her mouth. He could not move. He was like a stone, cold, desolate, white with a passion more extreme than fury.

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Then the girl bade her liege-lord hold out her hand to him. Prettily, coyly, she slapped his hand; her fingers lay upon the five snakes of his fingers.

Hugo's knees fell under him. He fell forward with his brow among the pine-needles. He shivered desperately, lifted his body and rocked it to and fro. He was aware in the aching of every tendon and nerve that he had been walking all night and the whole of the day before.

"And what have we for breakfast, my little poppet?" inquired Conrad von Felsenburg.

"The breasts of geese and the eggs of swans! And who's to make a fire to cook them by?"

"Who shall have twenty handmaidens to bathe her in milk and ten handmaidens ——"

"I have had enough milk in Midrans all my life long. I am tired of milk. In Vienna it shall be rose-water."

"There are lovelier perfumes in Paris."

"Art thou coming? Or wilt thou rather stay out in the dew and the cold morning!"

"I am coming, my pretty! And I shall milk all thy cows!"

"Thou?" She looked up at him, her eyes twinkling. She burst into a shout of laughter. "Thou?" He stooped down to pull her hair. She eluded him and ran, still laughing merrily, into her hut.

"Thou brown-eyed devil!" he cried, following her. He, too, disappeared.

"Oh, my Hansl, my little Hansl!" moaned Hugo. "Have I forgotten thee?" He undid the latchet of the basket. The bird was croaking restlessly. He was out like an arrow as soon as the lid was lifted. "Ah, Hansl, is it

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all familiar to thee? Thou knowest each separate branch of each tree? No, no, come back!" The bird was wheeling out into the open, in flight for Nanni's hut. "Come back!" he whistled with a low note. It was the only summons Hansl did not disobey. He pivoted himself backward on his wing-tip.

"That is no place for us now, Hansl! Not now! But, Hansl, we shall come again, eh?"

"Caw! Yes, indeed! Caw! Caw! Caw!"

He plunged through the centre of the peninsula of forest into the dusky continent from which it ran westward. On the dry springy carpet of pine-needles he lifted his feet heavily as if it were a marshland he waded through and each foot was laden with a slobby parcel of mud. So he would skirt her pastures and come down obliquely upon Midrans, over stony acres and grassy acres, through a further belt of pines, into high beechwoods, into the pines again, slung on the cloudy terraces above the dome of the Chapel of the Calvary and the thin green spire of St. Florian's church.

"But thou hast not thought," said Hugo, "of one certain thing? Thou dost not listen, Hansl. Thy heart is rocking like the nest in which thou wast born! She remains Nanni. Her heart is bewitched. But her body remains clean. What? Why? Fool that thou art! Not on her pal-liasse of straw he slept, beside her little body. He too, like Hugo, must sleep in the log-hut, upon the hay. Though he is. . . .

"A curse, a curse upon him!

"She is sound to her core, like a sweet hazel-nut. He has bewitched her. She is the white flower of the thorn, the pink flower of the wild rose. He has bewitched her.

"And a long way it is, Hansl. And I am very tired. I

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have never been so tired before. Hansl, I must sleep an hour or two."

"It will do you good, master," croaked Hansl. "Yes, sleep! We are in our own woods. Harm cannot come to us!"

"Harm has come to us," said Hugo. "But I am tired now. I must sleep!"

Hugo slept. Evening had fallen by the time he came down upon Midrans. It was old Julia, the announcer of deaths, the watcher by corpses, who first saw him as he entered the village. She held a pitcher in her hands, which dropped from her fingers as her eyes fell upon him. "Holy Mother of God! Holy Mother of God! Save us! Save us!" she twittered. "He has come! Woe upon us, he has come!" She made the sign of the Cross, fumbled madly for her rosary and, like a dead leaf on a wind, was blown into the darkness, still twittering.

"A pest on the woman!" cried Hugo Harpf.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

GRÜSS Gott!" said Hugo passing through into the living-room of his home. "Greet God! Anything to eat?"

There was a moment's silence, hardly more. I have indicated previously that, excepting under the influence of certain primary emotions, the Midransers were no voluble race. One by one the Harpfs lifted their heads. "Greet God!" they replied. A stranger unaware of Hugo's recent history might have thought that the young man had come in after an absence of some hours from his labours in the valley.

Franzl and Alois were away fighting. Hugo remembered that. Yet their absence seemed to make no difference to the multitude of his brothers. He had never seen such a complex sprawl of male limbs crowded together in such small space before. That was Lorenz, with a rag over his eye. Here was fat Ludl. This was the thin pipe of Florl pronouncing a "God greet!" And the smallest one, tucked against the oven, sleeping — that was Friedl, surely?

Fanni was, of course, washing dishes at the tap. She would have been washing dishes, or digging up potatoes, or feeding the pigeons, or fetching maize from the big chest in the attic, had he arrived at midday or midnight or before dawn. His mother, also; she would have been washing or digging, had she been alive. Neither of the women would have been in the room. But Fanni had

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never been alive enough to die. His mother was dead. There was death in the place.

Only one voice had not filled its place in the sequence of greetings that issued out of the masculine welter — the voice of Franz Harpf, his father. Slowly a shaggy head lifted itself from between the pair of huge arms that sprawled on the table. Franz Harpf's eyes were upon him, bloodshot. He was drunk. But he was not drunk as always before, in the days when his wife was at hand to be beaten, to grow big with his children, to be loved in his savage, perverse manner of loving. He was not roaring drunk as in those days.

"*Ach, Du!*" he grumbled. Then he too gave his greeting. "*Grüss Gott!*" His head was sinking down between his arms again, when something occurred to him. "Say! hast thou brought me much money?"

"Not a farthing!"

Franz Harpf brought out a few reproachful words. It was too bad. What with this war, too, and Franzl away. He had a bull-calf that died on him that spring. His last words were smothered between his arms.

It was Ludl, then, who detached himself from the heap of brothers. How the lad had shot up during these months! But it was a fat Ludl still.

"Shall I tell her, Hugo? Hungry, eh?"

"Trust him!" said Erich, the next older brother.

"Two days, I think," said Hugo, "that I've eaten nothing but wild stuff on the hills!"

"Ah! like Putzl!" This was the voice of Seppl that made itself heard excitedly. Putzl was the bull-calf that had died a month or two ago. "He, too, ate wild stuff on the hills. Hannes wasn't looking. Hugo will get puffed up in the belly and die, like Putzl!"

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"Never!" cawed Hansl suddenly from his basket. "He has another death to die. Caw! Caw! Let me out!"

The head of old Harpf suddenly shot up from between his hands. He roared with something of his old fervour: "Hansl! Hansl! Bring him out! Get him a glass, Seppl! Ho! Ho! Here's Hansl! I forgot Hansl!"

"Hansl! Hansl!" cried the boys excitedly.

"Here he is!" said Hugo. "A better friend he's been than any Christian!"

The bird cawed wildly, his throat thick with joy. He lurched about from pate to pate, almost bringing a strip of scalp away in his claws each time he made for a fresh stance. But Ludl had gone over to Fanni in the kitchen and told her Hugo was come. She lifted her blank eyes. "Hugo? Oh, yes! He will want food!" and she set to work at once, without enthusiasm, without any emotion at all, to provide something for him.

She entered the room. She had the faculty of being in a room and remaining exterior to it. She might utter words, but they did not even modify a silence, so that upon the clamour that now filled the room, her greeting fell noiseless as a shadow.

"Grüss Gott!"

Only Hansl responded, gurgling through the drop of wine he restrained in his gullet cunningly, savouring it. She went out of the room again.

But not even the excitement of Hansl's home-coming could interrupt too long or powerfully the routine of the Harpf household. It was not a conscious routine. The day had been heavy, limbs and eyes were heavy. Feet dragged bedwards sullenly. The day was over. Only Hugo remained, puffing an old pipe crammed with the

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saltpetre-drenched tobacco that he had not tasted since leaving Midrans. He leaned back on his chair, his feet on the thick slab of table before him. Ludl had taken his boots off for him. Ludl was a good lad, a fat creature with kind eyes. Erich, the elegant one, had brought up the name of old Tratzl. He may, or may not, have intended to carry the theme a step further. Hugo was not unaware how Ludl had glared at him, with those same kind eyes, how he had twisted the talk round into a safer region. Ludl was a good lad, a good lad, with kind eyes . . . Hugo was dozing. Someone was in the room. She had been in the room for some minutes now. He opened his eyes with a start. Fanni, of course. Who else could it be?

Would it be that other? If her eyes had danced less gaily, it would have been easier to bear. Oh, above all, if she had not bade him hold out his hand to her, his poisonous thieving hand . . . He had borne the kissing more easily, somehow! You shall see, oh, you shall see, Conrad von Felsenburg! Dirt you think we are, peasants, muck?

“What? Yes?”

She was talking. Had she not been talking for a minute or two? No, not that other! Fanni it was, talking — Fanni, his sister.

But she had stopped. Why did she stop suddenly like that? What was the matter with the woman?

“Yes, and further?” Hugo said sharply.

She pinched her skirt nervously and made a sort of greasy rosette of it above the knee.

“I was only asking if . . . Didst thou . . .”

Silence again. How exasperating she was!

“What wert thou asking? If thou wilt not talk, hold thy jaw!”

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He became aware of an expression he had never seen in her eyes before, a pathos, a transfiguration. Her cheeks burned as if flame had fanned them. She lifted her hand to her heart.

His voice was gentler now. "Come, Fanni. Tell me. I have no idea. What is it?" A pause again. "Speak, you lump!"

Words ripped out from her mouth suddenly.

"I want to know if you ever saw him in Munich? Did he give you a message for me? Did he ever say ——"

"He? Who? *Sacrament!* Whom art thou talking about?"

"But the Herr Captain," she said, "who else? Oskar Tachezy!"

She put her face into her hands and sobbed and sobbed. Large tears ran through her fingers. Her whole thin body creaked with her sobs. But Hugo was indifferent to her tears, or perhaps not even aware of them. He stormed. He raved. He shook his fists. The bird joined loudly and drunkenly in the infamous noise he made.

"The *Schuft!* The scoundrel! The lump of pig's dung! If I had his dirty little face under my boot now! The *Stink-Tier!* The skunk!" He clenched his teeth. He beat his fist down on the table till the glasses danced off on to the floor and smashed.

"Get out of my way, thou fool of a woman! Hast thou not a pin's head of brain? The foul carcase! The whore's bones! Let me by! I'm going down to the White Lamb! I want something to drink! Thunder and fire! *Drek-Sau!* Dirt-pig! Take thy wormy hands off me!"

He banged the door to behind him so viciously that all the doves in the dove-cot awoke and complained.

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"Hugo! Hugo!" cried old Harpf, cowering under his blanket.

"It will do him no harm," said young Ludl wisely, "to go out and get drunk!"

The tap of Fanni's tears dripped monotonously on to the floor.

2

It was good to be back again at the White Lamb. There was good wine still at the White Lamb. The war might rage for years among the outer heathen, but not even the pipes of the Schneggs, the Strelis, the Tambosis, the Harpfs, the Felsheims, seemed capable of draining dry the enormous tuns of Sud-Tirol wine stored in the cellars of the White Lamb. It was good wine. It was good Schnapps. It was good laughter. No hungry bellies in Midrans, no war in Midrans.

"*Grüss Gott*, all!"

"Ach, Hugo! *Grüss Gott! Grüss Gott! Brav!* Half a litre of the best for Hugo!"

"Another half on me, Herr Prandl!"

"Hansl! Hansl!"

"A quarter for Hansl! No, a half for Hansl, too!"

Herr Prandl rose, a vast barrel of a man. He had a stomach as huge as one of his tuns of wine, but the rest of him soared so enormously towards his neck and firm square head that the impression you got of him was of a tall, not a stout, man. A gold watch-chain looped in two spans the distance between his left-hand and right-hand waistcoat pockets. It seemed a triumph rather of the engineer's than the goldsmith's art, like a suspension bridge. He wore no coat. His shirt of grey homespun was

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rolled up over his elbows. It was a free-and-easy place, the Bauernstube of the White Lamb. There was more formality, of course, on the other side of the flagged passage, where the huge crucifix linked the space between floor and vaulted ceiling. There the worthies were gathered, Lorenz Brachmond, the Burgermeister, and Amrain the school-master, Wildhauer the miller, Huber, Felsenburg's head-keeper, Anton Wild, who controlled the village transport, and doubtless the priest, too, Father Josef, a quite amiable man. The Herr Baron himself dropped in from time to time, but, of course, not quite so frequently during the last few months, ever since the cunning devil had got his tail tweaked at last by that chit of a Tratzl girl. Clever little baggage! The noble gentleman had met his match. She wasn't going to give anything away without making certain of a few thousand per cent. on her outlay. All that parade of ribbons and shawls was a trick, after all. She remained a pure Tratzl. She held tight to her virginity as all the Tratzls to their gold. It was her capital. She knew it better than the Nairz girls, both of them, even though he had graciously married off the younger one to one of his keepers; she knew it better than the Stiegler girl, the Kranz girl, the wife of Tambosi — though it wouldn't have been safe to call the wife of Tambosi a virgin even before Tambosi married her. It wasn't particularly safe with any girl in the Floriansthal, a hot-blooded lot. Excepting only Nanni Tratzl. Oh, Nanni knew her way about. If that Tratzl a century ago, who set up the rival inn to the White Lamb, had had a wife or a daughter like Nanni, it would have been the Prandls who went crash, not the Tratzls.

And, of course, the whole business had turned her father's head completely. No Tratzl since the unlucky one

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had ever sat in the Herrenzimmer, the bar-parlour, among the gentry. The present one transported himself across the passage as fast as his doddering feet could carry him, the very moment that Tall Toni, the zany, brought the news down from the alp that the great one, the dispenser of thunders and lightnings, the almost more potent and ineffable one than any but a strict handful of saints and devils — that Conrad von Felsenburg himself, was sitting vis-à-vis with Nanni, in her humble hut, sipping a glass of the liquor she had brewed.

There were, of course, two senses in which a gentleman, in the parlance of the countryside, might sip a maiden's liquor. It made no difference to old Tratzl in which sense his liege-lord had sipped his daughter's. His old cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkled greedily. He picked up his glass and went over with the news, whinnying, into the Herrenzimmer. No one had been able to dislodge him since, not even the august Frau Prandl, in whose especial disposition were the affairs of that distinguished chamber. He stared at her haughtily, he, the prospective father-in-law of the von Felsenburg, in the eye of God, if not in the eye of man. He allowed Martin Huber to order another half-litre for him. Martin Huber was von Felsenburg's head-keeper, his bailiff. He had always found it useful to be pleasant to the connections of the lady temporarily in favour.

"Yes, yes," murmured the schoolmaster to the Burgermeister. "There is, of course, Hugo Harpf."

"A boy and girl affair," suggested the other.

"I always thought," said someone, "it was something more than that. They were very fond of each other. There will be mischief."

"You can't expect to be away — how long is it? — and find things just as you left them."

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"But then, there isn't much to be done when *he* — you know. . . . Another half-litre, Fräulein!"

They became aware that very night that Hugo Harpf had returned from Munich. He had just come into the other room, over the passage. Nothing happened in the White Lamb that Frau Prandl was not aware of, almost before it had happened, whether Tsentsel were going to smash a plate or Kati to leave a trickle of wine running.

"Hugo Harpf is here!" announced Frau Prandl.

Not that it mattered greatly, of course; but Hugo Harpf couldn't like it, possibly, this business of Nanni Tratzl and Conrad von Felsenburg.

Well, she wasn't the first young man's sweetheart who'd gone the same way. Yet Adolf Amrain felt a curious little jangle of premonition at his heart-strings. He spilt half a glass of wine on his bare knee.

It was a good thing that the roof of larchwood shingles over the Bauernstube was held down by a dozen rows of stones as big as skulls. Otherwise the noise might have shifted it and set it sliding down on to the manure-heap in the cow-yard behind. Everybody was at his best form. The company consisted mainly of youths too young and men too old for military service — excepting, of course, Toni and one or two other Trottels, whose services their country had unkindly rejected though its need for men was so sore. It was felt by the company that they had a tradition to support, and they supported it mightily. Drinking was never so deep nor laughter so uproarious. The absent ones must not be shamed. And with Hansl back from his adventures in the fighting-line . . . no, he and young Harpf had not been further than Munich yet.

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That was so, yes? Ah, well, he would not be back in Midrans long. They would be calling his class up in a few months at most.

"*Heil, Hugo! Prosit!*"

"*Zum wohl, Hugo!*"

"*Zwanzig Tausand Mann*" — someone struck up.

"Out with the Hackbrettel!"

"And thou, Andre, the zither!"

*"Und der Bauer hat
Zwei wunderschöne Töchter!"*

"Art thou dumb, Peppi?"

"Dumb! I'll knock thy teeth in! Say the word and I'll ——"

"No rows!" ordered Herr Prandl apprehensively.
"She won't have it!"

*"Und die Töchter hatten
Zwei wunderschöne ——"*

The thought evoked from Toni a shriek of prurient delight.

"*Halt's Maul!* Hold thy jaw, pig-head!"

The shriek died under Toni's palate and fell dully out over his underhung chaps.

Hugo's cheeks were flushed. His pale eyes were dark with wine. He completed the chorus:

"Hei-ra-sa, hei-ra-sa, Alte, mogsht a' chik?"

"Fill up his flask, Herr Prandl!"

"*Zum wohl!*"

"What about that song of the watchmaker?"

"Which?"

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"Als Uhrmacher reis ich von Hause zu Haus" —

"For certain sure! Strike up, Andre!"

"Und putz jede Dame das Uhrwerk fein aus" —

"That's not the way it goes!"

"It is!"

"It isn't!"

"It is!"

"To Hell!"

"I said," roared Herr Prandl frightfully, "no rows! She won't have it!"

Only Peppi Ganner remained consistently amiable. He seemed pleased about something. He handed his glass over friendly to Hansl; but the bird had not forgotten Peppi Ganner, the small boy who had not been chosen in the wood, the small boy who had clipped his wing. Hansl was drunk, of course, or he would not have permitted himself such language.

"Caw! Caw!" he cried. "None of your filthy spittle! Caw, you mean bastard!"

He flopped over towards the further end of the table, cawing furiously.

Peppi was not put out.

"What," he asked gently, "art thou going to do about it, Hugo?"

"About what? I can't help it if he doesn't like thee?"

"No, no, not Hansl. I don't mean Hansl. We'll both be called up in a few months. Thou hast not too much time."

"What then?" Hugo's jaw set. "What hast thou to say? Say it, or ——"

"Hast thou not heard yet?"

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"Silence!" ordered half a dozen voices thickly. "Silence! He'll hear in good time!"

Peppi's eyes — they were rather too close together for perfect beauty — looked up through his lashes towards Hugo, leaning over towards him from the further side of the table.

"Hast thou not heard yet?" he repeated.

The twanging of the zither ceased. There was silence. Suddenly Tall Toni broke in — shrilly, self-consciously, like the smallest child in the class who finds that no one else but he knows the answer to the hard question the teacher has just propounded.

"He means thy Nanni, Hugo! And the Herr Baron — Herr von Felsenburg!"

"Oh, yes!" said Hugo quietly. "I know!" He lifted a full flask of wine to his lips and drained it. "I know!"

This was disappointing. It was quite evident — excepting, apparently, to Hugo — that Peppi Ganner was aching for a fight. It looked like being the sort of fight that not even half a dozen Frau Prandls could stop, the sort of fight that ended in knives dripping and eyeballs hanging by tendons from the socket.

"Thou knowst?" asked Peppi. His cheeks were white, but his voice was still quite amiable. "And what then? Just that — thou knowst?"

Hugo still held in his hand the empty flask. He flung out both his arms, and the flask was projected by the movement against a wooden panel in the opposite corner of the room.

"I shall make her mine again!" he cried.

"How?" asked Peppi. "How?" repeated a few other voices.



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Hugo's cheeks blazed. His eyes were dark pits of smouldering fires.

"How? I shall work miracles!"

There was a pause again. The youth still stood with his arms outstretched, unconscious of Peppi Ganner, of all the youths and men in the room, of his attendant bird, of the walls, the ceiling. It was Toni again who broke the silence.

"What! Miracles?" he shrieked excitedly. "Miracles! He's going to work miracles!" He clapped his hands and crowed.

"The lad's daft!" said old Tambosi. Streli winked. Schnegg shook his head.

"And what miracles?" asked Peppi Ganner quietly.

"Like the saints?" chuckled Toni delightfully.

"Like Jesus Christ!" said Hugo.

"Loaves and fishes?" cried Toni. Hugo made no reply. "Walking on the water?" Toni further enumerated. "Casting out demons?" He suddenly caught Hugo's hand. "Will you?" he cried. "Will you cast out demons? Herr Hugo, will you cast out mine?" With a spasmodic and automatic fury, Hugo hurled the long-shanked creature away from him on to the floor. During the journey Toni's head came into contact with the edge of a bench. His face, as he looked up and scratched his head, was so rueful, so inexpressibly comic, that the laughter which had been stored in the air like electricity suddenly liberated itself. It broke precisely like a thunder-storm. Jagged teeth suddenly glared like lightning out of the shaggy caverns of mouths. Volleys of laughter pealed and hurtled. Slow and difficult words fell, at length, like rain.

"He's going . . ." but the voice could not continue.

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"He's going to work . . ." the next voice could hardly go further.

"He's going to work — Ha! Ha! Hoo! Ha! Ha! He's going to work —"

"Miracles!" someone blared. "Hoo! Hoo! Ha! Ha! Hoo! He's going to work miracles!"

"Like Jesus Christ!"

"Miracles!"

"Ha! Ha! Hee! Ha! Ha!"

Herr Prandl's stomach heaved vertically. He collapsed amongst his own glasses.

"Miracles!"

The loosened spate of laughter flooded through the chinks of the doorway out into the passage and into the Herrenzimmer beyond.

"Hugo Harpf," pronounced Frau Prandl, "says he's going to win Nanni Tratzl back by working miracles!" She laughed silently and severely.

"Hoo! Hoo!" bellowed Martin Huber, the keeper. "Oh this is fine, fine!"

"Like Jesus Christ!" the supplementary information was tendered.

"Hoo! Hoo! Hoo!" boomed even the staid Burgermeister through his tears.

Father Josef did not laugh. He saw the humour of it, like the rest of them. But there are limits to the best joke, in the presence of a priest, and they are set well to this side of the capacities of Jesus Christ. Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster, also did not laugh. He never laughed. He was too frightened.

But the cook laughed and the girls who helped her, and the waitresses; and the dogs barked and the awakened cocks hallooed and the cats slithered on their bellies and

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the stuffed blackcock in their cases almost flapped their wings and opened their beaks and crowed.

But the priest did not laugh, as I said. And Adolf Amrain, who never laughed, did not laugh. And for some reason Peppi Ganner did not laugh either. He stared into Hugo's eyes and his cheeks were grey as ash. And the laughter slapped Hugo's cheeks like hands, volley after volley; but he did not lower his head. He folded his arms and looked from mouth to mouth, where the jagged teeth showed. Then he walked slowly towards the door. As he skirted the end of the table, his hand was within half a foot of Peppi Ganner's cheek. Lightly and contemptuously, as a gentleman might box the ears of a scullion, he flicked Peppi's cheek with the back of his hand. Then he passed out into the passage, where the enormous crucifix hung between floor and ceiling.

"Like Jesus Christ!" murmured Hugo Harpf.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

OLD Tratzl had an incurable conviction that the whole world robbed him. But even Father Josef was heard to say that if anybody was clever enough to rob him of a farthing, he deserved to keep it — provided, Father Josef added, he bought a candle for his name-saint with it. That was one reason why old Tratzl employed Toni during the summer season to take up to Nanni in her alp-hut the load of bread for herself and the lump of salt for the cattle. Toni was honest. Toni was reliable. He would not start extravagantly sucking the salt or nibbling bread which did not belong to him. The return load of cheese and butter was even more dangerous. Old Tratzl would shake at the knees for hours at the thought that Nanni might not have packed the butter properly and the sun was getting at it through the holes in the great straw Kraksen Toni carried against his back. There was the further consideration that no other lout in Mid-rans would undertake the long journey for the penny or two which the old man magnanimously allowed the zany.

It was about five or six days after the hilarious night just described that Toni set out upon his fortnightly visit to Nanni's alp-hut. A curious creature is poor Toni, tall Toni, to be the instrument of Annunciation. As he toils up the mountain-side his trailing coat seems half-a-metre longer than it does upon level ground. It drags about him like the coronation robe of the king of zanies. His crown is

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a battered old velours with a mangy cock's-feather stuck in the ribbon. From time to time the coat-tails catch in a spiky branch of gorse or berberis. He twitches it free with something of the adept twist of a king turning on his paces and adjusting his train to his new direction. His sleeves do not reach to his elbows. The straw Kraksen on his back bends him double but he keeps on doggedly. He is beyond the belt of pines and the middle meadows, and safely through the higher and sparser woods. He meets no devils to-day. But be sure he does not venture into that region of melancholy rocks above the Joch, where the wind howls forlornly even upon quiet summer days, that bitter region with a curse upon it.

He arrives at length at Nanni's hut. He finds her poulticing a sick cow, which has had the evil eye upon it. He is breathless, but that is not merely with the long fatigue of the ascent. He sets his basket down and cries out to her. It is only Toni. Who takes any notice of Toni? She goes on with her doctoring. He has entered the shed. He plucks her apron. He is importunate. She whips round upon him furiously:

"Trottet, what dost thou mean? Dost thou not see I have something on hand? Out, I say. I will give thee thy sup of milk in some minutes. Leave me!"

"Nanni, Nanni, Nanni! He has come. He has come!"

"Let him go! I am busy!"

"He has come, Nanni!"

"Who has come, Trottet?"

"Hugo Harpf!"

"Ah!"

"I knew that thou wouldst ——"

"What concern of mine is it that Hugo Harpf has come? A Bauer! Get out, I say!"

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"He says, Nanni ——"

"What does he say? What matters it what he says? I am going to be the Herr Baron's lady, no?"

"Shall I go, Nanni?"

"I will finish with Putzl later. Come, thou shalt have thy sup of milk!"

"I thank thee kindly, Nanni. I kiss the hand. Thou art a good maiden. Thou wert ever kind to poor old Toni. O poor old Toni! Nobody ever loved poor old Toni. *Danke!*"

"*Bitte!*"

"And thy father said I might have the edge of the loaf with my milk!"

"Is my father sick?"

"The saints protect him! Thy father last night ——"

"Is it that which thou hadst in mind to tell me? I am busy to-day, I tell thee. I must ——"

"No, Nanni, no, Nanni! Don't go! Listen! Hugo Harpf said —— Oh how they laughed, Nanni! Like how they laugh at poor old Toni when he sees devils! Louder they laughed. But he has promised to cast out my devils. He is going ——"

"Quiet, Trottel! Thou hast heat on the neck? He said —— But it does not matter what he said. What did he say?"

"He said that as for thee, Nanni ——"

"How dare he talk about me? A Bauer! Am I not to be the Herr Baron's lady? I shall have a carriage with four milk-white horses. I shall wear silk gowns to cook the Knödel in. No. I shall not myself cook. I shall have a woman to cook for me, and one to cook for him."

"Peppi Ganner said ——"

"Peppi Ganner! Hugo Harpf! Pah!"

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"Give me the butter thou hast churned, Nanni, and the cheese thou hast made!"

"Trottel! Wilt thou not tell me what Hugo Harpf said?"

"He said he will not lose thee. He will win thee back again."

"Ho! Ho! Tra-la! How then?"

"He will work miracles!"

"What sayest thou?"

"He will work miracles!"

"Speak again, sweet one!"

"He will work miracles!"

"Like the saints, Trottel? Like the saints, my pretty?"

"Like Jesus Christ!"

Silvery peal upon peal of laughter tinkled out upon the thin air. Nanni held her sides. It was as if the sharp upland rocks gave back an echo of the deep laughter that had hurtled about the vaulted chamber of the White Lamb.

Poor old Toni! Everybody laughed. But he knew, he *knew*. Oh, there was no doubt at all. They had told him, in the woods. Had they told him? Oh, but he knew, he knew.

Or suppose Hugo might not after all? Then they would never be cast out, neither from the wooden walls of the forest nor the wooden walls of his head. They would shriek and scratch always, always. There would be devils always. Everyone laughed. Poor old Toni! Nobody loved Toni.

But Nanni was no longer laughing. No. Why had she stopped laughing? Why suddenly did her hands fall from her side? Why did a darkness come down upon her eyes, while the last silvery notes still bubbled in her throat?

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Why at all? Shall proud Nanni expound secrets for Toni, poor Toni, the Trottel? "Oh, get thee gone!" she cried. "No! wait!" she cried. Feverishly she drew from the basket its load of bread and salt and brought out of her small underground dairy the store of cheese and butter she had ready against Toni's coming. Clumsily she crammed it down. I doubt if the worst fears of her father were not realized that day, of cheese being squeezed into a milky pulp and the sun getting at the butter, the lovely yellow butter, worth as much these days as gold, as much fine gold.

What was it then that checked Nanni's laughter? Oh, such foolishness! The morning after Christmas day, two years ago. . . . Old Julia and her tales. . . . Such foolishness!

But it was not the memory of what old Julia had said that had made her throat numb and her eyes dark. It was because all of a sudden, just when her ribs were beginning to ache with laughter . . . (he was going to work miracles, the crazy lump, water into wine, casting out devils, loaves and fishes, miracles) . . . all of a sudden she found herself listening to her own laughter. And the sound of it was precisely the sound of her laughter, the morning after Christmas day, two years ago. . . .

Old Julia it was then. Another Trottel. No, it was not safe to call her that. You know what old Julia said, the dangerous one, who talked with the saints of God? Nanni was alone in the kitchen. She was busy making up the fire. The others were upstairs, for the old man's back was giving him trouble again, and her mother was attending to him. Nothing would induce him to spend a shilling on the doctor from Schlamms. And here was old Julia in the

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kitchen with her, at her elbow, whispering into her ear. How did she get in? Better not ask.

"Beware of him! Beware of him!" she bade. Of whom then? "Beware of him! Beware of him!" she repeated.

Of whom then? But the old woman would not be hurried. "Bid him beware of himself! Dost thou hear?"

Who? Who?

"Who else? Him with the raven, thy lover. Beware of him!"

Slowly, with signings of the Cross and fumbblings at the rosary and totterings over to the holy-water stoup by the door she made the silly tale plain.

Innocent Hugo, crazy old woman.

Yes, yes, she had made it at length. All with her own hands she had made it.

What then, mother? Oh, enough of these riddles, enough! I must get on with my work.

Made what? The holy stool. All with her own hands she had made it, out of nine different species of wood. She had come in late at the Midnight Mass, when all the village had already entered. Very silently she came in lest they should notice her and be on their guard.

For thou knowest, Nanni, that who kneels on a stool, a holy stool made out of nine different species of wood, at the Midnight Mass of Christmastide, thou knowest, hush! . . . he shall see who are the wizards and the witches, those who have traffic with the —

Julia tottered over once again to the holy-water stoup, and once more protected the girl and herself and the room and the two doorways with a sprinkling of holy water. . . . He shall see who has traffic with the Evil One. For the trafficker hath his back turned upon the Altar, from the Blood of Christ and the Body.

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I had eyes for none other. It was thy young man I beheld, him of the raven, his back turned upon the Blood and Body of Christ.

Beware of him, I say. Bid him beware!

And she shook off her terror then, the girl in the kitchen, as now the girl in the alp-hut did. Silvery peal upon peal of laughter tinkled out upon the air. She held her sides.

And then suddenly, then as now, her laughter ceased. Her hands fell from her sides. The old woman was gone. A darkness came upon her eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

THE personality of Conrad von Felsenburg presents problems almost as inscrutable as any element in the Miracle Boy's tale. I exclude, of course, the essential fact, from which and to which everything leads. I exclude the fact of miracle. But it is understood that that fact is not presented as a problem at all. It is merely presented. How was it that Conrad von Felsenburg, the scion of so noble a house, could bring himself at length to so portentous a hatred for a mere boorish peasant, the sort of creature that had been to his ancestors a thing hardly to be distinguished from the clod they walked on? There was an ancient antagonism, it has been said earlier, between the lordly house of Felsenburg and the lowly Harpf clan. But if it was a factor that no generation of Harpfs was not conscious of, it is obvious that to the von Felsenburgs it can never have presented itself as more than an irritation, like an attack of dry-rot in the furniture of a room, or a mildew upon an exterior wall. If the Harpfs had been more truculent or themselves more sensitive, the elimination of the Harpfs from Midrans would have presented no great difficulty. It is possible that if that fantastic rivalry between the nobleman and the peasant had developed under the feudal order of the old régime, von Felsenburg might have been content merely to expropriate the Harpfs from their few ancestral acres and turn over their painted homestead to one of his scullery-maids for her pigs. But the republican order which

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was shortly to be established was not very tolerant of noble privileges, where it spared them at all. There was no chance of sending the Harpfs packing, with the insolent whelp of a miracle-worker snivelling at their rear; and doubtless Conrad von Felsenburg had too subtle a mind to be contented with so crass a finale to the situation. But it is probable that it would have been no particular satisfaction to get rid of the rest of the Harpf brood without uprooting half the population of Midrans and the Floriansthal.

Oh no, it was much more suave and pertinent just to get rid of the straw-haired creature, to strangle him, as it were, in the rope his own fingers had knotted. Strangle him. A delicate death. Or had he an ointment or a formula or a cataleptic trick to immunize him against strangulation? It was a wily young man. But the risk might be worth taking.

It would be easy, but it would have no other virtue, to attempt to give some sort of political colour to von Felsenburg's odium; to explain it as an exacerbation of the hostility the dispossessed nobles entertained for the classes that had dispossessed them, of which, in Austria, not the least arrogant were the peasants. If the scene of this tale (assuming there might have been any such tale at all excepting in Midrans) were Wörgl or Innsbruck or Kufstein, such an idea might have been feasible. In Midrans, it is not. The values and categories of Midrans were not the values and categories of the outer world. Revolution, not less than war, was a condition of men and things beyond the last limits of the Floriansthal. Midrans preserved inviolately the values of elemental men whose sole commerce was with earth, water, forest, the unchanged commerce of three thousand years.

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To what extent, then, does the peasant maiden, by name Nanni Tratzl, explain the situation? She was obviously much more than the mere point of departure, the excuse, for the outrageous conflict that ensued. Outrageous, I mean, not because it is outrageous for two men who love the same woman to become enemies, but because the conflict outraged every canon of decorum — a strange word for Midrans, but I find no other — and every canon of nature. I say that the two men loved the same woman. With respect to Hugo one does not need to refine, qualify, expatiate, upon the word. He was a simple lad. He loved his sweetheart. She was false to him. So it stood for a time.

But it would be grotesque to state just so bluntly that the lord of the Floriansthal loved the cowherd maiden. It would be altogether too pretty, too idyllic. And yet it is likely that precisely that conception of the Dresden china group he and Nanni and her alp-hut constituted tickled his tortuous and jaded mind. He had a keen sense of the picturesque, the dramatic. Incidentally, so had Nanni. They must have recognized it in each other and played up to it with reciprocal skill. To this sense he added another, beyond the mental scope of old Tratzl's daughter. He had a fine sense of the bizarre. He liked to find himself pacing the lonely battlements of the Felsenburg, in this harsh comfortless land, after a spell of the patent and sunny gaieties of Santander and Monte Carlo. In his disused chapel he found it particularly entertaining to stack his satanics and erotica, not because these things impressed him, but because the pious Christ with a loin-cloth of Steinbacher, his seventeenth-century fresco-painter, and the less pious Christ without a loin-cloth of Félicien Rops, seemed to him amusing company for each other. The time was not

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far distant when his sense of the bizarre was to achieve its most triumphant spectacle, in this same chapel of the Felsenburg, where his predecessors commanded, by proxy, the conversion of water into wine, and wheat into flesh, not much more piously than he, also by proxy, commanded the conversion of kerchiefs into cats, and cabbages into tiger-lilies.

But it was not his sense of the bizarre that was in operation during these spectacles. It was something much more urgent. As he leaned against the rigged-up proscenium and gazed down upon the gawky louts who constituted his audience, there was a hint of anxiety in his eyes and in his drumming fingers, which surely did no credit to a von Felsenburg. Oh, but bizarre the spectacle was — the polished gentleman from Oxford Street in London, the wild-eyed Aissouïah from the Sahara, the lean Fakir from Bengal. (Or were they all polished gentlemen from Oxford Street in London?) Bizarre they were, these, and the tall sallow nobleman, and the shuffling bull-shouldered peasants — a curious company.

But by this time Nanni Tratzl was not among them.

No, it was not merely because she had a sense for the picturesque that Nanni became Felsenburg's opposite figure in the Dresden china grouping. In the first place, the pretty piece did not so compose itself without quite a lot of trouble on Felsenburg's part and a lot of compunction on Nanni's. He had met her some months ago, a week or two after she had taken up her cattle to their summer pasture. In any real sense, of course, it was the first time he met her. He was certain that her pretty face had struck him on some earlier occasion — it was a procession, a wedding, a funeral, something of the sort. Or had he merely

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seen her about in the village? He certainly had not spoken to her before.

He was back again in Midrans after a long absence. It had been a delicate and exhausting time. Not merely because of that strange, slow, fair Lithuanian girl, or the Spanish girl who had preceded her and tried to shoot him when he gave her her congé. It had been an exhausting time not merely because of the women. There had been work to do, such precise adjustments, the sowing of such rare seeds, the fosterings of such fragile and, oh! such consummately poisonous growths.

He was tired. He needed a rest and some sort of diversion. The suggestion had been made to him, too, that it would be more advisable if he were not apparent during the time the plants were putting forth bud and flower. He could hardly fail himself to come to some harm in their exhalations. If he did not, might it not be evident that he held his nostrils because he knew what injuries were potential in the innocent air?

He was tired. And that Lithuanian girl — how much had she taken, after all, how little given! How little she had to give! Curious hands. Curious eyes. A pale scent of death in her hair. An uncanny creature, best put out of mind.

It was Martin Huber who suggested that they might pass to their chamois-hunting by way of old Tratzl's alphut over the Joch this side of the Teufelswand. Huber knew well enough that his master was interested in other quarry than blackcock or capercailzie or chamois. He liked to take it in his stride, before he got to the real business high up among the peaks. Martin Huber tactfully stood aside, as he had stood aside before, while his master presented his compliments, rather lordlily, rather mockingly,

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to the maiden in her bower. Watteau and Fragonard, Bion and Theocritus — very touching, very rose-pink. Martin Huber propped himself up against his rucksack on a gentle slope of gentians. He took out his cat-skin tobacco-pouch and filled his pipe dreamily. It depended on the maiden, of course. The longer she had it in her to entertain the lord of the Floriansthal, the more satisfactory was it for all parties concerned. But, of course, Huber's taste was not his master's. Once or twice his juiciest morsels had not held up his master for more than a perfunctory half-hour.

Certainly less, considerably less, than half an hour, had passed when Conrad von Felsenburg reappeared. He kicked Martin Huber savagely to his feet, barked out an oath at him and set out towards the Teufelswand, his fists clenched. Huber had time to notice the flaring cheeks. He swore later, but he was drunk at the time and the kick rankled, that he heard her slap von Felsenburg's face. He certainly was too far from the door of Nanni's hut to have heard any such thing, however violently she may have done so. She may not have done so at all. It is too painful a spectacle to present to the imagination.

Von Felsenburg was aware that he needed rest after his exhausting labours in Europe. But that was not the same thing as stagnation; and the young lady in the alp-hut seemed to promise a diverting, but not a too strenuous, time. He was mistaken in that. His reception when he presented himself a second time, even though Martin Huber had preceded him with gifts, was not much more encouraging. Perhaps he was losing his ancient skill. He said to himself petulantly that ten years ago he would have strangled the slut, and that was paying the wretched

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little spitfire a higher compliment than she deserved. He was probably overestimating the ravages that time had made upon his powers of fascination. They were still considerable and they had, in fact, achieved much of their purpose before the intelligent young woman threw him anything more than a grunted "*Grüss Gott!*" She had first the phantom of her lover to lay, Hugo Harpf in the dark city northward, beyond the mountains and the plain. It is likely, in any case, that her love for Hugo was never so vehement a thing as Hugo's for her. He too had tickled her vanity, as now the lord of the Florians-thal tickled it with infinitely more expensive feathers. Nanni was vain. There is no point in denying that. She wore Hugo's strength and skill like baubles, like shawls and ribbons. He was the best shot in Midrans, of the young men of his generation. No youth could withstand him, when over the long table in the White Lamb right hand grappled right hand by the middle finger, and each sought to drag his rival from the table, till the veins stood out like cords, and the sweat dropped from the forehead.

But von Felsenburg had subtler accomplishments.

And after all, when young men once went forth into the outer world, who could be sure that they would not take to themselves town hussies, who put a red grease on their lips (they said) and a sort of flour all over their cheeks? And who could be sure that young men might ever come back at all? Were they not called up to be soldiers, according to their classes, wherever they might be? And once a young man was a soldier, you might as well reckon he was dead, or at least useless, till you found out anything to the contrary.

Oh, yes, with von Felsenburg's assistance, she managed

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at length to calm her compunctions with respect to Hugo Harpf.

The process was assisted by the frequent recollection of an episode in the history of the Hatzbergs, who were the lords of the upper Schlammsthal. Three generations ago (her mother had told her) an innkeeper's daughter had become the lady of Schloss Hatzberg. There was no reason to believe, thought Nanni Tratzl, leaning her pretty head against the flank of the cow she was milking, that that maiden was a comelier maiden than she.

She knew she must hold herself in hand. The Herr Baron had tricks a hundred times more potent than honest Hugo, who had no tricks at all. The Herr Baron had tricks of the hands, the mouth; above all, of the eyes. He could bring a poor girl's heart into her mouth or send it down into her shoes. He could make her knee-caps tremble like reeds and bring a dew upon the hands and the forehead. But then, oh, but then, was the time when a maiden must scratch, scream, bite, and never yield an inch. She should teach him a maiden remained a maiden in an alp-hut that might be a wife in a castle.

And the game amused Conrad von Felsenburg enormously. It was so bright, so alert, so gay, so full of yieldings that meant nothing and storms that meant as little. He had not known lips so fresh and yet in their childish manner so sophisticated. He recalled the blonde Lithuanian and shuddered, the hot-house Spaniard and a nausea took him. A hundred phantoms defiled between her bright eyes and his own deep eyes, and she kissed them away, as if he were a village lad and she a leading lady. She was so utterly a child, so guileless. He told her so. She was so void of self-consciousness, that the knowl-

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edge could not hurt her, could have no meaning for her. She smiled twice as guilelessly.

But he must needs sleep in the log-hut in the meadow, should he desire to spend the night close to her. She was such a child. And the young women of the village, even some younger than she, were such stinking old women. The time would come. Even if it meant that the old buck were stalked at last, and by so demure a gun . . . Oh, that was fantastic, of course. He might safely leave that sort of minor poet's tomfoolery to the Hatzbergs. He was von Felsenburg.

"Kiss me, thou rabbit, thou dog, thou goat, thou pigling!"

"My big, big bear!" she murmured.

2

"I shall work miracles!"

The extraordinary pronouncement of Hugo Harpf, the painter of saints and whitewasher of walls, fell like a stone into those remote and quiet waters of Midrans. The circles it had occasioned spread wider and wider about the Bauernstube of the White Lamb, where the stone had first been cast. In the last circle it described it included two men, both dalesmen of the Floriansthal, who were as remote from each other in every human attribute as any two men on the globe might be, separated by any barriers of creed, colour and continent. The first of these was Conrad von Felsenburg, lord of the valley; the other was Franz Holzhammer, master of the furthest of those families of mountain peasants to whom I made reference earlier, the extra-territorial subjects of Midrans, stuck almost inaccessibly away in wild gorges close to the rim of

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that glacier at the head of the Floriansthal, from which the steely waters of the Sturmbach issue, hurtling. It might be said of von Felsenburg that he had almost ceased to be a man, being a creature in whom the strands of humanity had been disintegrated by the antiquity of his blood, the heritage of corruption and exquisiteness his blood had transmitted and his own experience increased. He was something other than a man, more formidable, more abominable even, if we are to attach to the word "man" an average decent meaning. Franz Holzhammer, on the other hand, had not begun to be a man. The villagers of Midrans were men, at least, however simple and violent. He and his kind were shaggy beasts, dumb, monstrous, capable of one idea at a time, and possessed of that one idea as an animal might be, now aware only that it must find food, now that it must find a mate, now that it must tend its cubs. There was one single conception the animal is not capable of which distinguished Franz Holzhammer from the brute order. He had the lust of God.

When at last the word came to Holzhammer of the proclamation of Hugo Harpf, he did not fill his cloud-hung hovel with raucous laughter. The laughter that had been so uproarious in the White Lamb had gradually lessened its fervours on its journey thence. In the first houses of the branching gullies, men had smiled. But they were puzzled. It showed in their great vacant eyes. He shall work miracles? Like Jesus Christ? In the further steadings, they did not even smile. The word went slowly towards the harsh acres at the end of the world, where the cold breath blew from the glacier.

And Franz Holzhammer fell suddenly upon his knees on the crude stone-paving of his hut, where his blood should trickle not long hence between the jagged slabs.

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And he proclaimed "Jesus Christ is come!" and beat his gnarled forehead upon the stone.

Not so Conrad von Felsenburg, lord of the valley. He laughed, but not uproariously, like the peasants. He was a man of breeding. He made no noise at all when he laughed. He merely threw his lean head back and showed his teeth.

It could not merely be said that the young man was drunk or silly. The words were not the words of a zany or a young man in his cups. Some form of religious hysteria? A wartime neurosis? The young man, apparently, had spent the last few months in Munich. Some phantasm induced by underfeeding?

Or, more likely, had the young man been taken up by some sort of illusionist, who had realized the value of using a country bumpkin as one of his accomplices? Had he learned a few tricks, a little cheap pseudo-telepathy, neo-levitation?

Von Felsenburg was amused. Magic, so to term it, was one of his minor hobbies. It flattered his intelligence that the tricks of a Donato, a Pickmann, were so patent to him whilst vast audiences of shopkeepers, select audiences of savants and society ladies, gaped and goggled.

He felt the girl's finger-tips fluttering against his throat. He brought his eyes back from their satisfying contemplations and rested them upon hers. What was the matter with the girl? She looked scared. She looked as if she might burst into tears any moment.

"Little ninny!" he said, catching her brow between his hands. Then she flung her hand round his neck, loosened her head from his hold, and snuggled up under his chin.

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"Oh!" she said contemptuously. "He is a Trottell, eh? He is, isn't he? Say yes, Conrad!"

"Perhaps so!" he agreed. "But I rather think not. Probably a bit of a trickster, Nanni. Dost thou love me, Nanni? Dost thou love me, bunny?"

"No! No! Only a Trottell!" she insisted. "He is not clever enough to play tricks!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

IT could at no time have been said of Hugo Harpf that he was a hilarious young man; but he had been fairly amiable, at least, in the old days, so long as he was not hungry. After his return from Munich you could not say so much. He lounged about at home for hours, moody and silent; or he lurched over to the White Lamb, his broad shoulders rolling slightly, the heavy feet trailing. The Midransers must not be accused of any special delicacy; yet somehow they did not find it easy to get to grips with the young man and extract a word or two of comment or explanation. There could be no doubt that young men, with a litre or two inside them, had made public statements of the sort before. Toni, Fritz, Anderl, Hiasl and the other zanies, professional and amateur, born or developed, had not needed any such inducement to make statements even more comical. And yet, when you came to think of it, was it possible to utter any more comical statement, however hard you tried? "*I shall work miracles!*"

One or two unwise young men got impatient. "And how then, Hugo," they demanded, "when dost thou begin?"

"Begin what?" he asked. His jaw set dangerously. The blue eyes glinted. No, surely, this was not the rather lazy, rather good-natured Hugo of old time.

"Begin to work miracles," they concluded timorously. It seemed rather difficult, before a full house, to draw back.

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A smashed nose, a few broken teeth, was all the answer they received. These things could not be called miracles. But they took a man's breath away just as powerfully.

Before his departure for Munich, Hugo might have been considered one of the more temperate drinkers, though he, too, upon occasion, could stow away as much liquor as might have floored three dalesmen from any other valley and a dozen lily-livered townsmen. Now he put away as much as the most hardened toper. But it had no recognizable effect. He sat in his corner silently, with his eyes half-shut. Sometimes, however, he would permit himself to tell a tale or two of the hunger in the cities, of the women prowling in the streets to exchange their bodies for half a square meal. He told them of Frau Kieltrunk, her coppery hair, and the green ribbon round it; of Frau Pfaffenheim also, and her operatic ambitions, her bosomy bellows, the high notes like a brake jammed suddenly on a cart. He laughed raucously as he told these tales. It was not the Hugo Harpf who had gone forth to Munich.

He had developed a violent distaste for his old job, or at least the finer parts of it. Old Harpf railed at him, but it was as much as the old man could manage to get even his smallest sons to take any notice of him. Perhaps it occurred to old Harpf for the first time that it might have been happier for him had he begotten fewer. With Franzl, the eldest son, away at the front, there was quite enough work on hand at home, without going afield to look for it, even though Franzl's absence had compelled old Harpf to get rid of two or three of his beasts. The old women who wanted tablets for their sons would have to wait for them. There was nothing nearer high art than a shed to be whitewashed that Hugo had any use for. High art and

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Herr Tachezy meant the same thing to Hugo; and he felt kindly disposed towards neither.

It was only with his fat and watchful younger brother, Ludl, that Hugo permitted himself any degree of friendliness; certainly not with Erich, his next younger brother, who was apprenticed to Wildhauer the miller. Young Erich already, at seventeen, had intentions upon a Wildhauer daughter. He was a village elegant. He wore his hair long and made it smooth with a grease stolen from Fanni's store.

It is possible that Ludl, who was not very intelligent, did not realize the implication of Hugo's celebrated words. It was possible that in the most secret chamber of his silly little heart, there was an occult understanding, a thing not in the brain but in the cells of his blood. He, too, was the son of Hugo's father and mother. The two lads stayed down, often, long after the others were in bed; or when Hugo was away in the White Lamb, Ludl did not fail to wait up for him. They talked for hours, not getting much said, hardly more than a few disjointed syllables. But Hugo had need of the lad. His heart ached.

So it was that one night, very quietly, young Ludl put that question to Hugo which no swaggering bully of the village dared ask, or had dared ask more than once.

"And when, Hugo, dost thou begin?" asked Ludl.

"Soon, *bua*, soon! Be content! When the cattle come down into the valley, Ludl! The time is upon me!"

There was a great bustle and excitement in Nanni's alphut. Tall Toni always made noise enough for three when he did anything, his huge feet stamping about loosely all

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over the place, as if they had no connection with each other. It was a sort of poetic justice that Toni made noise enough for three, for old Tratzl expected him to carry enough weight for three down into Midrans that day. Fritz was there to help him and so was Nanni's small brother, Seppl, the party having come up from Midrans the night before. Seppl, at all events, would see to it that he didn't overburden himself. Everything was being packed up for the descent into the valley, from the last handful of flour and grain of salt in the chest, to Nanni's own small wooden box in the dairy and the calendar on the wall. The morrow was Rosary Sunday, the sixteenth after Trinity. All Midrans would be at the early Mass to-morrow, including all the alp-herds, men and maidens, who had been away in the hills during all these months. To-day from every region the herds would be descending in a great bravery of wreathed horns and clamouring bells. The village would be gathered at the foot of the great avenue which led down from the higher meadows, through the pine-woods, into the hollow which separated Father Josef's house from the Kalvarienberg. They would be standing there in critical knots, discussing every beast that passed by on its way to the stall, and just how much cheese and butter each of the alp-herds had managed to prepare.

Nanni sighed contentedly. She had nothing to fear from their scrutiny. She had worked hard. She had not let her noble lover interfere with her work in the least. In fact, after an early fall of snow one Saturday night, that heaped up the yard, she had got him to help her with his own fine hands dig a path for the cattle between their shed and the water-tank. She was sharp enough to perceive that it gave him a thrill of pleasure to see that though her hands

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were small and pretty they were as efficient as any man's. He liked to see her tackle the bull in its more surly moods. Europa, he called her then. Or swing the great cheese-cauldron into place over the fire. Or squeeze the udders of her cows deftly into the shining pails. Or open their mouths to give them a dose of medicine, when they needed one. It was no little doll of an alp-maiden he loved, but a woman who did her job as efficiently, and, in a sense, as secretly, as remotely, as he did his. He smiled upon her benignly. He slipped the small padded case out of his pocket, and showed her the gold brooch in it, sparkling with soft fine gems.

She fastened it upon her blouse, this same morning of the descent into the valley. Then she dived further into her box for the ring he had given her. The ring she lifted was not gold. It was not silver even. It was a cheap thing, made out of some alloy, fashioned into the figure of an owl with staring eyes of cheap red glass. She uttered a cry of vexation. It was the ring Hugo had given her. She was sure she had thrown it away. She flung it from her now, towards the door of the hut. Toni saw the gesture. He wondered if Fritz also had. Fritz had not. He was busy tying together the handles of the sauce-pans and frying-pans. Toni stooped like a swallow and lifted the ring. It did not seem possible that Toni was capable of so deft a movement. His eyes shone.

"The ring of Herr Hugo!" he gloated silently. "It was on her finger once! It shall be on mine now! Hee! Hee!" he cackled suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked Nanni sharply.

"Nothing, nothing!" said he fearfully.

"Get on with your work then!" she bade.

They had always been jealous of her, the other girls in

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the village, because she had always managed to have prettier kerchiefs than theirs and because her cheeks were redder and her hands were smaller. When they saw, this evening, how sleek and fat all her animals were, like Frenchmen, their eyes would start out of their heads. And then, when they came closer, and they saw the brooch and the bracelet and the ring, knowing very well where they came from, they would turn round in the road and be sick.

She stood before the little patch of mirror weaving her plaits cunningly about the back of her head. She looked at herself dispassionately, and not without admiration. She had worked hard enough these months; the others must get the work done now. It was her day. She had worked harder because of Conrad von Felsenburg than she would have worked for her father's stocking in the grain-chest, with the gold pieces in it. A girl who can get the most out of an alp-hut can get the most out of a farm-house, out of a Schloss even, out of a castle of Felsenburg. She adjusted the brightly embroidered kerchief about her shoulders again and fastened the brooch lower down upon her bosom. Her neck was so white a neck. You would say that she was a nobleman's daughter, not merely a *Bauer's* . . .

She interrupted her meditation brusquely. She did not allow herself to go woolgathering frequently, or for long.

"And this mirror, Trottel!" she cried. "Do not forget!"

Seppl, her small brother, had given himself the pleasanter part. He had gone scampering off higher up the mountain to load his straw Kraksen with rowan berries and marguerites and tufts of heather and some rarer flowers marked down on the face of a slippery rock over a torrent. He threw his lovely load down in front of the hut

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and together he and Nanni braided the horns of the beasts with them; most lavishly of all, Tsepl, the bell-cow, proud queen of Nanni's herd. Toni and Fritz had most of the furniture of the hut piled up in their baskets and encumbering their arms, the cauldron, the pails, the churning machine, the pans. Seppl took charge of the calendar, Nanni's comb, some spoons, and two cups. The cortège set forth.

Very comely she looked that day, with a bunch of flowers in her hat, and flowers in her cheeks, and flowers all about her, flowers swinging between the horns of the cows, until you thought it was they that made all that music, not the heavy iron bells suspended from their embroidered leather collars. Beside her, Docksel, the goat, paced protectively, presenting a stub head to any creature, four-footed or two-footed, that dared come too close to the lady. It was the duty of Seppl to see that the kids did not fall out of the procession, whenever some juicy spray of greenstuff challenged their errant noses. But the calves mooed solemnly, following in the wake of Tsepl and her attendant heifers. A sense of the solemnity of the day was in their large mild eyes.

Less than an hour after the start of the journey, a breeze brought to them along the clear autumnal air the sound of another herd moving down from its alp, the sweet discordances of the cow-bells, a mooing and a whinnying, and the jubilant yodel of the lads.

"And that," murmured Nanni, "will be the boss-eyed Anna from Streli's alp." A stranger from another land who encountered the boss-eyed Anna would have been struck rather with the dimensions of her goitre. But that was no imperfection to call for any especial comment among these mountains. It was to straighten her eyes

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rather than to subdue her neck that the miserable maiden, who had no father, had made her three-day-long pilgrimage to a shrine of the blessed doctors, Cosmo and Damian. They had been obdurate.

From a hidden region beyond a wood on her opposite hand came a yodelling again, and a sudden clamour of bells, as the wind veered.

"And that," murmured Nanni, "will be Moidel, the Prandl's girl. She let her best heifer go straying and break its legs!"

She looked again at her own herd. Fit for a princess. The air was sweet with their breaths.

As the day proceeded, from every pocket of the mountains the sound of the descending herds came, like a host of belfries moving. And there was no maiden, Nanni knew well, had done her labours more satisfactorily than she, had tended her cattle so well, had made such white hills of cheese and yellow hills of butter. She turned her ring defiantly about her finger and told her golden bracelet as it were a rosary. But for all the glad noises of the converging herds, and the wreathed horns of the beasts, and the fine flowers in her hat, unhappiness descended upon her. She felt ill at ease.

"They can talk their tongues out of the back of their throats!" she said. But she knew it was not because of the tittle-tattle which would be about her ears during all the long winter months that she felt unhappy. Nor was it because she had even for a moment hoped that her lover, like the lovers of the other girls, those at least who were not away fighting, would come forth out of a thicket and set himself beside her and so lead her down into Midrans. She knew, he had not disguised it from her, that the people of her world were not less clots of mud now to him

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than before. By some freak she was a creature born out of such gross loins. But he knew her only as a skyey creature, suspended in a lovely comical sweet-smelling cradle above the high tree-tops.

And now, going down into her own world again, among these men like cart-horses and these women like broomsticks? What use now would the lord of the Floriansthal have for old Tratzl's daughter?

No, it was not that which lay uneasy upon her heart, now that they were coming down upon the great wood which hung directly above the Calvary Chapel and St. Florian's green spire. All the herds that had descended from the alps upon this side of the mountain were now gathered together into a single procession. The girls and the youths had not greeted her very affably. It was not that which had dismayed her. Now the leading beasts had turned the angle of the great wood. The clanging of their bells struck upon her ear athwart the trunks of the pine-trees. Here was the avenue which led down into Midrans, shut in right and left by the smooth slabs of hill upon which rose the Calvary Chapel and the house of Father Josef. Below it in terraces descended the wooden roof-tops of the village, with the small boulders that held them down and their tiny belfries. The people stood about where the avenue opened out, waiting, calling, yodelling. All of them were gathered to cast an eye upon their own herds and the herds of their rivals. Already the noise of their disputing was in the air, all among the hubbub of bells and mooing and barking and snatches of song.

And some yards in front of the nearest of them a young man leaned his broad shoulders against a tree. There was a raven upon his shoulder. His green cap, with its feather stuck in the ribbon, lay beside him, stuck upon the dead

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fragment of a tree, long ago blasted by lightning and carried away for firewood. The yellow hair had in it a tint of more formidable gold than her ring, and her bracelet, and the brooch in her embroidered shawl. He held a crudely cut stick of ash in his left hand. His cheeks were somewhat sunken. He was paler than before. Now at last she saw his eyes. She knew what her unease had been, all day long. And as she came closer to him, the snatches of song ceased and there was no more bickering about so many kilos of butter and how fat these beasts were and these were not. The pale blue eyes held her. There was an expression in them at once profoundly melancholy and profoundly sardonic. She intended merely to walk past. But she found, when she was abreast of him, there was no movement in her limbs.

"*Grüss Gott!*" said Hugo easily.

She tried to return his salutation. She brought nothing more than a croak out of her throat.

"Thou shouldst have roses!" he said.

The procession of beasts and girls, the villagers gathered to greet them, stood still, like a frieze upon the pediment of a temple. The cow-bells for the most part were silent, save for a few here and there, which, subtracted from the general symphony, struck the ear harshly.

"Roses?" whispered Nanni Tratzl. "What need I with roses?"

"Ah, yes!" said Hugo, shifting his weight from one shoulder to the other. "For a fair maiden!"

Casually he poked his hat from the dead chip of the tree with the end of his ash-stick.

"Behold roses!" he cried loudly and fearfully. A green stalk rose from the wood, putting forth shoots as it rose. Leaves uncurled and opened. The tight-packed buds ap-

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peared. The buds burst their sheaths. The bush swayed under the weight of its great red roses, opened in glory upon the strict air.

Then he bent down and tore the roses from their twigs. He heaped his arms with the fay flowers, the flowers of miracle.

“Take them!” he bade.

She stretched out her arms like a girl in a trance. There was no sight in her wide eyes. He thrust the roses upon her, but her taut arms could not contain them. They slipped from her arms on to the ground at her feet and withered as they fell. They were a heap of brown petals and withered leaves.

“Roses for a fair maiden!” he cried again. And turned on his heels from her and fled into the wood.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

NO purpose is served here by approaching along the lines of science, philosophy or psychology, into the manifestation of the rose-bush, held by the peasants of Midrans to have been a miracle, the first of the miracles performed in their own territory by the young peasant, Hugo Harpf. Conrad von Felsenburg must have considered it not less from those points of view than from the standpoint he publicly maintained, at least for a time: namely, that Hugo Harpf was a clever cheap-jack, who had picked up a few tricks during his apprenticeship to some "Professor of Magic" operating in some Munich beer-hall.

The point I am here concerned to make, or to repeat rather, is that the account just concluded of the miraculous blooming of roses is derived from the priest's men, the enemies of Hugo, as well as from Hugo's men, who painted his image on their house-fronts. There were not a few who witnessed the event, later to be both fervently for and against Hugo, who declared for a few days or for a few weeks that it was all an illusion. They had witnessed nothing at all. But it seemed strange to them, seeing that it was an illusion, and that nothing more had passed between Hugo and Nanni than a few awkward words — it seemed strange to them that the illusion they had all witnessed should have been identical, from stage to stage.

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They wagged their heads. They crossed themselves. They did not omit to moisten their fingers with holy water, from the stoups in their own houses and in the Bauernstube in the White Lamb. An illusion it was, though all had seen the same thing. Or some imp mocked them. They spoke together uneasily. They were silent when Hugo Harpf came and joined them.

But Tall Toni brightened at the sight of him, pressing his ring to his skinny bosom. He seized Hugo's sleeve or put out his middle finger delicately and touched the young man's naked knee.

"Tell me," he cried, "when will you ——"

The others tried to drown his words, to shove him out of the group, to fill his mouth with a chunk of bread or sausage that happened to be on somebody's plate. Hugo alone showed no embarrassment. On the contrary, the shadow of a smile lay on his lips. He seemed not dissatisfied with himself.

"How then?" he asked easily.

"Oh, when," cried Toni, swallowing with an effort the great chunk of food that had stopped his mouth. "Oh, when, Herr Hugo, will you again perform miracles?"

"In good time," said Hugo. "I am thirsty now. Ah, Friedl, it is thou? A half-litre for Friedl, Kati! So thou hast chopped off the whole thumb? Or thou hast left any?"

Friedl, the wood-cutter, was not loth to drink a half-litre with Hugo. Nor Hugo to drink again when Friedl too had ordered in his turn. But a man was not . . . how should poor Friedl put it? A man was not at his ease, was he? drinking with Hugo. Not as if Hugo were this young man or that young man. How could you put it? Hugo was not Rudolf, after all, or Michel. How should he be? But a

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man was not . . . he was not at his ease, was he? A pest upon it! Fill up, Kati! What's wrong, woman? Who's been at thee? Pangs in the belly, eh? God save thy soul! Father Josef will have a word to say, eh? Get moving, thou fat sow!"

Hugo's eyes were like a pool high on the hills, at morning. They were so cold and only just blue. And when he laughed, he laughed so silently. "*Teufel!*" muttered poor Friedl. Then he looked behind his shoulder nervously and crossed himself once and again.

It was Martin Huber who brought into the Herrenzimmer the satisfying news. It trickled through into the peasants' room opposite in quite a few minutes. It might have taken longer if Hugo Harpf had been in the room. But he had not yet come in.

Martin Huber brought the news in from his master, the Herr Baron. A sigh went up in the White Lamb. Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster, mopped his brow. It was a sigh of relief, mainly. And yet it was not only that. It could not be said that there was a breath of disappointment in it, also? For if what Conrad von Felsenburg said were true, then there would be no more of this uneasiness, this suspense, this excitement. It had all been a set-off, in a measure, to the black news that trickled in to the valley from the War. And if it were true, then Hugo Harpf was a cheat. And if Hugo Harpf were a cheat and had fooled them, then, Sacrament! there would be a bald poll where hair like pale carrot had grown. And Hansl, too — Hansl would not be spared. They'd have Hansl nicely plucked, feather by feather. It was not the same old Hansl. It was certainly not the same Hugo Harpf.

For it was like this, Conrad von Felsenburg explained suavely. The great man was himself, of course, no witness

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of the event. But he had it all very minutely described to him by Huber and one or two others. The secret of the trick lay to some extent in the hat, but mainly in the trick rose-bush. The great man had seen that sort of thing done frequently. It was, in fact, rather a mediocre illusion, rather cheap and common. But the young man was obviously only a beginner, and not much more could be expected from him at this stage. He would probably practise other illusions. They must keep their eyes open. So long as the young man was nice and honest about it . . . He had come back lately, had he not, from Munich? He probably had his rucksack stuffed with tricks, magic pistols, cubes and cards, eggs, cylinders and so on.

All a matter of sleight of hand, the great man had explained to Martin Huber. Rather transparent, wasn't it? First the hat covering the dead chip, then the stick poking the hat aside, then the trick-bush does its work.

Moreover, von Felsenburg had added, perhaps Martin Huber would like to do the trick himself? It seemed an exciting prospect to Martin Huber. What a grand evening he would have at the White Lamb, bidding a miraculous rose-bush grow.

Very well then. The great man would order the trick from a firm in Frankfort that specialized in "magic" properties. It was just a market commodity, like boots or door-knobs. And seeing that the winter months were coming on, he thought it might be amusing — would it not, Huber? — to order a few other miracles to be included in the same box. They might help to while away the long evenings; excepting, of course, if the enemies abroad and at home . . . but that was another matter. That had nothing to do with miraculous rose-trees.

"You see now?" asked Conrad von Felsenburg.

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“You see now?” echoed Martin Huber.

Oh, they saw right enough in the Bauernstube. Yet they were still puzzled. They scratched their shaggy heads.

Or did it mean, perhaps, that Conrad von Felsenburg too was going to work miracles upon them? They puffed heavy clouds of smoke into the air and shuffled their feet uneasily under the table. It was a strange world. They tried to get down to their cards again. But they had no mind for cards. Toni was in a corner, counting his fingers. Fritz, his rival, sat in the opposite corner and leered from under his bushy brows. There was nothing to do but to start baiting the Trotters. Young Streli squirted a mouthful of beer into Toni’s face. Toni thrust himself back into his corner and whimpered. Another wit threw the hot ash out of his pipe-bowl into Fritz’s face. Fritz snarled like a dog. Yes, this was more lively! The card-players gathered their cards together. There was a call for Kati and more drink. And now Hugo Harpf came in, Hansl upon his shoulder. There was no movement in their direction. No one, for the moment, seemed anxious to tear out Hugo’s hair and Hansl’s feathers. Nobody spoke. Toni’s eyes lightened. Fritz’s eyes leered more uglily under the brows.

And now of a sudden Fritz was speaking. The words came from his misshapen mouth in a series of sharp yelps.

“Ah, Hugo, we all know now! We all know! Fool that thou wert, fool! Thou shalt not be the only one to work miracles. There are more miracles coming from the big town. From the shop in the big town. I know and I’m only a Trotter. We all know. Didst thou think ——”

But Toni was upon him, clawing at his mouth with his nails.

“Leave him! Leave the poor Trotter!” bade Hugo.
“Leave him, I say!”

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"No!" said someone. "Let them fight it out! This is fine! I lay a half-litre on Fritz!"

"On Toni! On Toni! Look, he's drawn blood!"

"Quiet!" cried Hugo. "There'll be enough blood drawn in Midrans!"

Toni slunk back into his corner again. Fritz wiped the blood from his cheek with the corner of his coat.

"Ah, then!" said Hugo lightly. "The prince-poacher has spoken!"

"Yes," said Heinz Abenthum, a quiet old man who sat away from the others, tugging at his pipe and offering no word till now. "He has said that the thing was a trick. It is to be done again in this place by Martin Huber, or by any of us. So we heard. Not an hour has gone by."

"But she shall not be his," said Hugo. "He shall not perform *that* miracle! Is there no guitar to-night? Shall we have no music?"

"What is upon us in this valley?" mused Heinz Abenthum. Toni was counting his fingers blissfully.

2

At the time when Conrad von Felsenburg dispatched his note to a warehouse in Frankfort for a box of magical tricks (to include the miraculous rose-bush, the collapsible sword, the disappearing top-hat and several other cheap and popular mechanical illusions), the Central Empires of Europe were breaking up like a child's sand-castle in an advancing tide. Just as completely the outlying bastions were crumbling, the Turkish, the Bulgarian, the Czech, the Hungarian. Only the line that faced the tide from Germany held for a time, as a wall of the sand-castle which the child had reinforced with pebbles and shells might

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have stood out longer than the buttresses of wet sand. And the German wall, too, fell in at length.

But Conrad von Felsenburg's order was duly received and executed. Not, of course, with that dispatch upon which business-houses in Frankfort properly pride themselves. A delay of several weeks, under the unusual circumstances, might be pardoned by the most exigent customer. An armistice had been signed during the receipt and execution of Herr von Felsenburg's esteemed order. The face of Europe had changed. The Austria that had dispatched the order was different from the Austria that received the invoice. It contained a much leaner Tirol, a narrow strip of itself.

But Midrans was none other than Midrans, thrust up against the head of Florian's dark valley no less securely than of old time, when the southern frontier of Tirol was so many leagues further into the wine land than the chipped ridges above the glacier. And though there was a vague rumour of astounding events in defeated and victorious worlds, the rumour, not less vague, of this small war between a nobleman and a peasant lad had the firmer possession of their minds.

There was, praised be Jesus, a truce to the great fighting. The men who were absent would return. Some would not return. And those whose turn had been imminent would not need to go. Willi Streli and Peppi Ganner, Hugo and Friedl, would not need to go.

And the miraculous rose-bush, the collapsible sword, the disappearing top-hat, duly arrived in the house of Conrad von Felsenburg, that mansion as crude and craggy as the block it was based on, that looks down upon the village of Midrans through a few glazed and many unglazed windows, like some ill-disposed creature staring out of a

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hundred sockets. And it cannot be gainsaid that in the long history of that house, never had such foolish merchandise been presented there, though monkeys that gibbered, harlots that simpered, jesters and jongleurs, had not been denied admittance. It can be said that the appearance of these contemptible toys is the first episode in the humiliation of Conrad von Felsenburg, which, more than the loss of Nanni Tratzl, provides the key to the fatal rancour that took to itself such miserable means to compass so foul an end.

The art of prestidigitation requires, after all, an arduous apprenticeship; and it was as irrational to expect a striking success from Martin Huber after the study of a page of instructions as it would have been to put Martin Huber's rifle into the hands of a clerk and expect him to hit a six-inch bull's-eye at a distance of a hundred and fifty yards. So von Felsenburg assured himself, not without reason.

For if the reports that came to him from various quarters were to be trusted, the performances of Martin Huber had not been very impressive. It might almost be said that they had produced results exactly contrary to those which had been hoped for. Of course it had not been particularly intelligent to hope for any bright display from Huber. He was a well-meaning fellow, better spoken than the majority of these louts, and a match for most poachers in the valley. But he was no Cinquevalli, no Maskelyne. He had fingers like shovels. He was a Bauer. Yet that had been the point, surely. The idea was to show the long-headed mules that any one of them, however mulish, could bring a miraculous rose-bush to birth if he paid a few shillings. But they had not been convinced. No, of course

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they had not been convinced. The intention was to undeceive, not to deceive them.

And what, after all, did it matter what they thought, a parcel of boors? He knitted his brows. He stroked his slightly twisted nose contemplatively. What they thought did not matter. But the fact was, unless the young man's words had not been distorted, the fact was Hugo Harpf set himself up deliberately to challenge the lord of the Floriansthal, himself, Conrad von Felsenburg. It was preposterous. There was a time when an earlier von Felsenburg would have hurled a filthy pup like this young Harpf into a heap of dung and carted the load over to the square in front of the White Lamb and kept him there for three days and nights. That would have taught him manners. If it had not, the dungeons of the Felsenburg had a few other tricks in reserve.

A man must sit tight these days, even a von Felsenburg, these days of howling demagogues and ancient scutcheons befouled with that same dung which should have provided a three-days' home for Hugo Harpf. A man must sit tight. He clenched his fists. But whatsoever abrogations the ancient houses had suffered, this privilege at least remained to them. They could be conscious of themselves only, they could exclude from their minds the oaths and stench that surrounded them. It was, however, impossible, he realized, to force himself into unconsciousness of that tow-haired lout, with the black fowl upon his shoulder. "I shall have her again!" he had proclaimed. He would work miracles, and he would have her again!

Conrad von Felsenburg was white with wrath. His eyes flared. That the clumsy young impostor should imagine that he might steal from a von Felsenburg the plaything he desired, and by the babyish mummery which was to

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impose upon the pig-like intelligences of the peasants of Midrans! He snorted.

He calmed himself. This was unseemly. This was not worthy of him. He straightened his tie. The girl, devil take her, was coming. Cunning little witch. She was playing coy. Oh, he'd tame her!

She had dared to remind him . . .

He got up from his chair again, and paced about the room agitatedly. He knew. She had told him before. The young mountebank had thought himself affianced to her. But God damn the insolent whelp, did he not realize what a privilege it would be, assuming that von Felsenburg were to hand the girl on, for him, a peasant, to be allowed to drink the same liquor as his lord had condescended to sip from?

Oh, more than sip! He would leave little more than lees to the hussy by the time he'd finished with her!

There was a time once when no peasant would have dared to drink the liquor offered him by his wedded wife even on the night of their wedding, before waiting to learn if his lord deigned to drink first. The noble time! For a few moments Conrad von Felsenburg permitted himself to become as sentimental as any office-boy in Vienna. He heaved a sigh. The noble time!

Ah! And here the wench was, climbing the brambly path to the wicket on the side of the house over against the stream. In future he would see to it that she came up to the great iron-studded door in full view of Midrans, and pulled the rope of the enormous bell that clanged upon the courtyard beyond. Why did she walk so listlessly, with head bent, and her hands hanging by her side? She knew he must be watching out for her. She was at her tricks again. He'd see to it she came prancing like a

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kid, pox take her! Had she forgotten who it was, in his graciousness, who permitted himself to see her?

He went over to a window on the farther side of the room and called out to a woman scrubbing his dogs in the yard below.

"Ho, there! Anna! Don't open at once!" he shouted. "Let her wait a few minutes!"

3

It is possible that if Martin Huber had had his attention turned at an earlier age to the science of illusionism, instead of to the science of forestry, he might have been a passable conjurer in a decade or two. That is a speculation based rather upon his enthusiasm than his success. It was a pity. He worked so hard. But it was not the same thing. The disappearing top-hat he never managed at all. He was convinced something was wrong with the mechanism and earnestly besought his master to get the people at Frankfort to change it. But von Felsenburg was very rude about it. He shoved him through the door and slammed it in his face.

However, with the miraculous rose-bush he became quite adept. With a haggard air of easy virtuosity he caused it to put forth its crinkly-paper flowers at every possible opportunity. He did not wait for an invitation. "*Meine Herrschaften!*" he began, clearing his throat and waving his wand over his hat. Toni and Fritz and Hiasl could have gazed on the marvel for hours. They wanted to do it for themselves. But the others lost their interest after the twentieth performance.

No. It was not the same thing. It lacked the spontaneity of Hugo's evocation. And Hugo did not repeat his effects.

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The air became full of whisperings. This thing was said by one, this thing was said by another. "It is a lie!" the comment was. "Such things are not!" And to-morrow he who said it was a lie, came over to him to whom he had said it and proclaimed: "Yes! With my own eyes I saw it!" And turning to his neighbour he declared what he had seen, and his neighbour said: "It is a lie! Such things



are not!" But his neighbour, too, upon the next day or the next week announced that his own eyes too had witnessed it. And he crossed himself and said a Pater-noster and an Ave Maria.

Such marvels as the saints had performed and the Lord Jesus Himself. He had healed the sick and cast out devils. He had scooped up the snow — for now the thick winter snow carpeted Midrans as at the time of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem — he had scooped up the snow and held out

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a handful of wine in his hollowed palms. He breathed upon the frozen pool under old Wildhauer's mill and the ice was water. He had stepped forth from the bank, all his gross weight thrusting down upon his iron-shod boots from his broad shoulders. He trod the water airily like a skating fly.

"A lie? Go, fool! I tell thee with my own eyes ——"

"What power is this upon him?"

"Heaven help us all! Hush! He, the Black One . . ."

"Beware! Utter not the Name!"

"What? Hold thy jaw! The Black One? The Bad Spirit? Has he not all his life painted the tales of the holy ones? Rather one of them, I say ——"

"Oh, all this is madness! Is all Midrans drunk? A peasant, one of ourselves! Your wits have left you!"

"Thou hast seen nothing? Ho! Wait then!"

"It is not he! It is some other! He remains a peasant, I say! The spirits have come down from the woods. They are tired of pulling Toni's nose. They want handsomer noses. It is they who are making you squint. As for him ——"

"Ho! Wait then, I say! Bid him thrust his two bare arms into the roaring oven again, as I have seen. They came forth unscathed, I tell you. Like Daniel from the Den."

"Yes, I too was there. Thou rememberest? So was Anderl—the Trottell from near Wilding. He had come with some cotton for Frau Prandl. Cotton is to be bought now. They say that the tax ——"

"Enough! We know! What then of Anderl?"

"Ho, the poor Trottell! He, too, put his fists into the oven as the other had done. Didst thou not hear him

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squealing and whimpering for hours, like a kicked puppy?"

"But he himself? Has it been asked of him why, what?"

"He goes about quietly, not saying much. It might hardly be said the strangeness was with him. To-day he has been mending Anton Wild's ladder. He will be in the Bauernstube to-night. He will sit with his bird upon his shoulder amongst the rest of us. It might be thou, or this one. But when the eyes steal upon him and he is not aware of them, there is something at the corner of his mouth — how shall I say it? — a smile, a — I know not what!"

"But the girl? Tratzl's daughter?"

"It is said that surely ——"

"Hush, thou! Hush! He is coming this way."

"*Vater unser, der du bist in dem Himmel* ——"

"Ah, thou, Hugo? Good day! And the ladder, it is mended yet?"

4

It was not to the blue turret-room that Conrad bade Nanni to be brought to him that day. This was an eighteenth-century room, decorous and lovely and somewhat effeminate with its blue brocade and gilt furniture; and neither this von Felsenburg nor any of his predecessors back to the time of that exquisite gentleman who had so furnished it, had ever allowed it to register the vicissitudes of his fortunes. It might be necessary to lop off whole forests from the estate or to sell a silver candelabra for a few kronen. But the blue turret-room remained inviolate. It was a room which the von Felsenburg ladies never entered. The ladies who entered it bore other names.

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There was a curtain of blue brocade over a recess in the interior segment of its wall. But Conrad von Felsenburg had not drawn it aside yet to bid Nanni Tratzl share its privacy.

He was getting restless. How long was this little farm-slut to keep him kicking his heels?

But to-day he would not obscure the issue by the presence of any tantalizingly undrawn curtains. He bade her be brought into his own room, heavy with ancient leather furniture and imposing with the shades of earlier von Felsenburgs rendered in marble and canvas. There was a litter of books about his feet and on the table before him. Had such things interested Nanni Tratzl, she might have crept on tiptoe towards him and looked over his shoulder to see what study so absorbed him, for he had not lifted his head or uttered a word at her entrance. Against his elbow was a volume entitled *Des Erreurs et des Préjugés répandus dans la Société*, produced by a writer named Salgues in 1811. Propped up on an ink-stand hollowed out of black granite was another, entitled *Hexenprocesse und Geistestörrung*. Other volumes, rare and worm-eaten, or fresh from the printing-press, jostled each other on the table, at his feet, on the deep couch behind him. *La Magie blanche dévoilée*, *Les Plantes Magiques*, the *Bibliotheca Magica* of Graesse, the *Fascination Magnétique* of Cavailhon, *Les Propos d'un Escamoteur* by Jérôme Sharp, a whole encyclopædia of confessions, testaments, explanations, unveilings.

The Baron turned a page and went on reading fixedly. The girl said not a word, the garrulous maiden from the alp-hut, the laughing creature, with bright eyes. There was no sparkle in her eyes now. When would she speak? Was she trying to play a game with him? She stood un-

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moving, just in front of the door. She played with her hands nervously as if she were rinsing a garment. He was aware somehow with his own nerves, his own skin, she stood there, fidgeting so. It was not that he either heard or saw. He had an almost uncanny faculty for being aware of things that he neither heard nor saw. No, not uncanny. No one would repudiate more vehemently than he such a nonsensical idea. It was physiological, a mere subtle receptivity of his nerves. But it was a faculty which had caused many a medium at fashionable séances and many a professor of metapsychical arts to blanch and fumble at the rumour of his presence. He followed each movement of her hands accurately. How could he be expected to concentrate on his reading?

Suddenly he exploded: "Stop! Stop playing with thy hands. Thou makest my head ache!"

She put her hands behind her back as in the old days when Sister Teresa had chidden her. He turned round on his swivel-chair towards her.

"Come here!" he bade. She came. "Kiss me!" She touched his cheek with her lips. "On the mouth!" he bade again. She touched his mouth with hers. Her lips were cold.

"Thou art frozen," he said more gently. "Does the old man prevent thee from loading the oven with logs? Tell him I will send a cart-load down to-day!"

"He is in bed! The pain has moved!"

"But thou! What is with thee? Has it moved to thee?"

"I am well!"

"But it is not thou! What is with thee? On my knee, now! So! Put your arms about my neck!"

She heaved a sigh and snuggled up against him. But there seemed no comfort there.

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"What is with thee? I will not have this!"

"Thou knowst, Conrad!"

"How dost thou mean I know?"

"Conrad! Conrad!"

"Yes?"

"Dost thou know old Julia?"

"How should I not? The Anzägerin, announcer of deaths!"

"Conrad, let me sit on that chair! My mouth is stuffed. I cannot breathe."

"Oh, little poppet, poor little lady! Shall I bid Anna bring thee ——"

"Nothing at all! It is better now!"

"What then of old Julia?"

"Conrad! Conrad!"

"How?"

"I am afraid!"

"Of old Julia? *Zum Teufel holen*, I shall ——"

"No, not of her!"

"Out with it then! Do not hide it longer! It is that jackanapes, that blob of filth! I have told thee a hundred times! I am sick of explaining to thee! Wilt thou never understand? He has been in the hands of some charlatan in Munich. I know them, I know the whole company. Some charlatan who felt that never would he have a more profitable field than a great city in a time of hunger and despair. He took this lout to be his accomplice. It is an easy enough trick in a time of peace and plenty. Now it was like plucking wings off flies. A dervish, he called himself, or a fakir, or a yogi, or no more than a mere doctor. Nanni! Nanni! Thou art not listening! I am not used to talking to deaf ears! By Jesus ——"

"It was the Christmastide before the last. Julia came

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into the kitchen upon the morning after the Midnight Mass. She had made herself the stool of the ninefold wood."

She talked evenly, as if she rehearsed the events in her own mind.

"Nanni! Nanni!" He went over and shook her.

"Ah, well!" she cried, with a sudden petulance. "Let it be! I say nothing!"

"Further!"

"She had seen him with his back turned ——"

"I know! I know! My nurse used to tell me. I remember! His back was turned upon the bread and wine, wasn't it? She was spying out for her rivals, her sister witches. God bless the old hag! And this Harpf fellow was all the fish she netted! Nanni!" he called out to her sharply.

"Yes?" Her eyes were uneasy.

"Canst thou believe in such idiocy? Is it possible?" He looked at her with something like distaste. He was aware of her as a farm-hand, the daughter of stinking farm-hands. He thought of her in her clogs swishing through wet manure, or washing up greasy pans, or with her hands in a washing-tub, scrubbing sweaty garments after their three months' service on the foul body of a peasant.

"Conrad!" she looked at him piteously. She had lovely eyes. Now that they sparkled less, they had another loveliness, velvety, like old wine. And her lips, too——

He must not start dithering now. He must try and make the poor creature understand.

"Listen!" he said patiently. "There is not one trick this young man has picked up which I have not seen more skilfully performed elsewhere, in Paris, in Tunis, in

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London, in Bombay. I have not seen this bumpkin's performances myself. I only need thy accounts and Huber's to see quite clearly just where the fraud is. I have always studied this business which fools, and criminals, call magic. Have I not told thee of the men from India called fakirs and how they bury themselves alive for thirty days and come forth and breathe again? But they do not. It is a trick. Have I not told thee of the men in Africa who are called aissouïahs? These eat serpents and creatures called scorpions, it is said. They do not. It is a trick. There are some, however, with stomachs so debased that such a diet does not revolt them. The serpents they devour are creatures without venom, slipped in among the noxious ones. The scorpions are fangless. All trickery, all insolence, such as this peasant is seeking now to hoodwink you all with. Have I not told thee of men who throw ropes into the air and clamber after them? Of men who devour stones and glass? Of men who drink boiling lead and thrust their hands into furnaces? "

" Yes! " she cried quickly. " Yes, like Hugo! He thrust his hand into Tambosi's oven. I was standing with the other girls and I saw him. Up to the elbows! "

He stopped. He looked at her harshly.

" All trickery! " he said. " I too could thrust my hand into an oven. I too could eat glass! " He paused. The logs were roaring in the great oven faced with pictured seventeenth-century tiles. That particular trick would need preparation. Then he caught sight of a small wine-tumbler on his table, among the books. " This would not! " he said.

He flung the wine away from him, cracked the tumbler between his teeth, and swallowed a few fragments. " Be not afraid! " he bade her. " It will do no harm! I have done this before! "

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"But Conrad, Conrad? Thou too, then? Hast thou arts? Hast thou magic?"

He hurled the broken glass against the oven in his anger. "Blockhead!" he shouted. "Wilt thou never understand?" He went over to her and shook her roughly by the shoulders in his temper. "Not magic, I say! Not magic! Dost thou understand? A trick! A trick!"

He thrust her into her chair and sat down somewhat wearily upon his own. He hit his forehead with the back of his fist.

"What is coming over me?" he murmured. "How can I stoop to this? Like any mountebank in a fair! This is odious!"

She was playing with her hands again.

"Stop!" he cried peremptorily. "Stop! Listen!"

"What then, Conrad?"

"My God, I will give you tricksters! I will give you doctors, all of you! You gibbering nincompoops, to be taken in with such pap!"

"What art thou thinking, Conrad?"

"Oh, quiet, quiet! Do not twitter! Yes!" he cried loudly. There was a note of exultation in his voice. "It will cost money! But there is money enough now at the Felsenburg! Enough of this tomfoolery! Hassan Bey will come if I ask him. He dares not say no. And Chaman Dall too. He would be effective. And Mr. Sylvester, from Oxford Street. Oh, how the clods will gape! Oh, what a princely show to set before such an addle-pated crew! Oh, not all the whores of Nice ever had such an entertainment provided for them! *Prachtvoll! Herrlich!* How have I not thought of it before! Ha! Ha! Ha!" he roared. "Ha! Ha! Ha! How they will gape! And this pale worm ——"

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“And these gentlemen?” Nanni pleaded. “What will they do?”

“They will stick swords straight through their body. They will lay themselves down upon planks with hundreds of six-inch nails sticking into them. They will saw ladies into six pieces with saws — the head, and the trunk. and the two arms, and the two legs. No, little fool, no! They will not really saw the ladies into six pieces. It is all a trick. Thou shalt see how it is done. They will put the ladies together again. And then — What? What art thou saying? Speak louder!”

“Yes, Conrad! This also will they do? As I came here to-day ——”

“Will they do what?”

“Hugo Harpf was mending a ladder in the yard at the White Lamb. And Frau Schnegg brought in her little girl to him, Maridl . . .”

“Pest! Yes?”

“And Frau Schnegg went down upon her knees and tore at Hugo Harpf’s sleeve and showed him the face and neck of the little girl. They were all thick with spreading scabs. And Hugo Harpf put the hammer down and leaned towards the child and breathed upon her. And the scabs were gone like breath from a mirror. And the face and neck were clean as snow on the hill. And the mother went down upon her knees ——”

“Get out, thou foul bitch!” shrieked Conrad von Felsenburg. “Get out, thou miserable half-wit! Get out or I’ll knock thy skull in! Get out!”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I

NOBODY threatened to harm poor little Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster. But his pale eyes seemed nowadays always on the verge of tears and he gave you the impression, as he moved apologetically between the schoolroom and the White Lamb, or the parish office and the White Lamb, that he was always stooping to escape some cudgel that sooner or later must descend on him. It was only in the quantity of Schnapps he drank — he preferred Schnapps to beer or wine — that he showed himself the Midranser he was, and of a family as ancient as any. For the rest he was rather an incongruous little creature among those towering peasants. The chamois-tuft as large as his own head stuck into his hat, and the embroidered leather shorts displaying his knuckly knees, gave him the appearance of some forlorn tourist from Dresden who had wandered into Midrans and never found his way out again. But the tuft came from the spine of a noble stag carrying fourteen points which he had himself shot after stalking it for two days in a country of slight ledges overhanging huge ravines, and those same knuckly knees had carried him along very manfully. You could not suspect such prowess, as he sat dwarfed by those vast shoulders in the White Lamb, despite his prowess in tossing down fiery glass after glass of Schnapps. It was no more than his habitual ration, but it would have seemed to you that he was trying to keep out of his mind some

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fear which had long impressed it and now lay like a shadow upon him even in the keen sunlight and was damp on his brow even in a cold wind.

Adolf Amrain, it seems, was the first person who realized how the miracle-working of Hugo Harpf must inevitably split the village into two internecine camps. But in that realization he cannot long have preceded Lorenz Brachmond, the Burgermeister, a powerful and judicious man, heavily bearded. Being the regent of the affairs of so small a village as Midrans, in official documents he figured no more sonorously than as *Herr Vorsteher*. But it was felt in the Floriansthal, and perhaps by himself too, that the mayor neither of Vienna nor Rome could be more suitably addressed as *Herr Burgermeister*. It was a position to which the councillors, the Gemeinde-Räter, usually elected the richest and stupidest of their own company, so as to retain full control of affairs, with the reinforcement of their nominee's wealth. In Midrans it was Brachmond who had his own councillors elected, and he was careful to maintain his own position and the affairs of the village in equipoise by keeping the scales even between the radicals, of whom Herr Prandl (or his wife, more accurately) was the leader, and the clericals, the party of Father Josef. Politics in Midrans provided no violent distraction from drink and lust, praying and poaching, rifle-range and band-practice. Lorenz Brachmond was a judicious man, more silent than his colleagues, and his slow words came out of his beard, somewhat muted, somewhat oracular. There was not a beast ill, a high word spoken, in the village but Brachmond, and Amrain, his deputy, were not aware of it as soon as it had happened. Yet for a long time they permitted themselves to have no palpable knowledge of the strange events with which the whole village was

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whispering like a pine-wood in trouble. The wood, they knew, did no more than rustle now. But Brachmond and Amrain, and a few others, had a premonition that in a few weeks, or a few months, it might be convulsed to its roots. They kept silence in the Herrenzimmer, so far as they might. The querulous vanity of old Tratzl no longer disturbed them. He was on his back, entertaining nightmares of milk wastefully running over and potatoes peeled thick as cloth. A compensating nightmare entertained him too, of a daughter installed as my lady and all Midrans kissing her foot. The whispering that went on in the orchard between a certain handsome scoundrel, by name Erich Zeiler, and no other woman in the world than Minni Tratzl, his own wife, did not reach his ears.

They kept silence, then, Brachmond and Wild and Amrain and Wildhauer and the other worthies who foregathered in the Herrenzimmer. Though no other thought was in their minds than the walking upon the water, the healing of the scabs, the straightening of the ankle crooked since birth, they allowed themselves no other talk than stallions and heifers and the new wine imported from Spain by the Schlamms wine-merchant. And when there was a tale of a fine shirt turned wantonly into an old shoe, or of a sack of good flour putting forth a stick of cow-parsley, they still kept a check upon their tongue, though for the most part it could be felt that amongst them too the division was establishing itself of Hugo's men and priest's men, those who held Hugo possessed by God and those who held him thrall to the Devil.

And yet if you passed by Hugo in the square, and for a moment your mind were occupied with other things, the sight of him would not jolt you back into any thought of this uneasy debate, spoken or unspoken. It may be the

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youth held a pot of paint and a long brush in his hand, on his way to somebody's barn or fence. Or it was his father's cows he led to the trough against the White Lamb. Perhaps he shambled along more heavily than before; he was paler. But what was he else, still, than a peasant-lad, Franz Harpf's third son? How could you say anything more of him than that? The village had gone crazy. The village was drunk. "*Servus*, Willi!" he called out. "*Servus*, Hugo!" the word went back again. And if Father Josef went by, no one was readier with his hat. "Greet God, high-worthy one!" "Greet God!" the priest replied, and slowed his gait down for some seconds as if there were things he would like to say to the young man, or to ask him, perhaps. And Hugo, too, halted for a moment, looking at the priest square in the eyes; but no words came to the priest, and he opened his missal as if that had been his intention from the first, and went on, with head bent. But he had not failed to notice how a child, running out from a lane, had perceived Hugo standing there, and gone over to him and pressed his mouth on his coat-sleeve, and run further upon his journey. And Father Josef did not lift his eyes from his missal, but their expression was not gentle, as of one pursuing in his mind the sacraments of God. His eyes were dark. His forehead was like a charged cloud.

It is likely that the worthies of the Herrenzimmer would have taken up the matter of the Miracle Boy from the beginning if it had not been for Father Josef. It was, after all, their concern as much as any new public cattle-trough the peasants had called for or the grazing rights of the Three Larch meadows, which Frau Prandl declared to be common to the whole village, and Martin Huber insisted was an ancient perquisite of the Felsenburg estate. Of course the gentlemen in question imposed no check on

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themselves in their own homes. With their own eyes their children had seen, their wives had seen, they themselves had seen. But it was not the same thing in the bar-parlour at the White Lamb. In a sense the Gemeindeamt itself, the parish office, was merely an antechamber to it. Documents were signed there, money paid for parochial duties, but over the tables of the White Lamb destinies were discussed and appointed; the Herrenzimmer was the brains of Midrans, if not the heart. The uncouth shaggy body of Midrans sprawled in the Bauernstube across the passage, this side of the crucifix.

How much longer, then, could the thing be kept out of their deliberations? Already when they met in the village, they brought their heads together, they discoursed in low voices, or sharp and hostile voices, according to their modes of thinking. All of them, that is to say, but Lorenz Brachmond and Adolf Amrain, whose mouths were sealed by discretion on the one hand, on the other, fear.

And the priest? They all knew, and he knew himself, that he solved no difficulties merely by keeping away from the White Lamb. It could not be said that his province had been invaded. Had he, priest of God, ever dared to let his shadow fall upon the outermost limit of that dark province, excepting only when all majesty, all potency, were deputed to him and he set himself in the mid-place of the land of miracle and lifted a wheaten wafer above his head and it was flesh; a chalice of wine and it was blood? But soon, soon, surely he must declare himself! How could he refrain much longer? How? And what must follow upon his declaration?

It was the affair of the awakening of Jacob Kranz which first forced anathema to the lips of Father Josef.

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But I cannot help speculating why there never seemed, for even a brief period, any likelihood that the priest might incline to some sort of association with the Miracle Boy. A man of ambition might have conceived that an alliance with such a creature could lead them both anywhere, from Vienna to Rome, from the recovery of the lost provinces of South Tirol to the recovery of the lost churches of Europe. But Father Josef had no ambition beyond completing his various sets of ecclesiastical book-plates. Like every actor in this drama his mind was circumscribed by the limits of the remote theatre which was its setting. The rest of the world was an unreal thing, even the next valley. The rest of the world trafficked in thin abstractions, provinces stolen, currencies inflated. In the bar-rooms of Midrans the loss of Sterzing and Bozen was a matter for rare and factitious fury only. And currencies inflated had less importance here than elsewhere, for the essential unit of barter remained still the cow-in-calf, the ewe, the cock of hay, the waggon of logs.

Midrans, then, was the world for Father Josef, though he was not of the Midrans blood. No man could question the sovereignty of Midrans though he came into it, a stranger, or, being a native, he left it for one reason or another. The native came home again, the stranger remained. (By stranger I do not mean alien, such aliens as Tachezy and myself. What use for us in so strict and jealous a polity?) Midrans was the whole world for the priest not less than for Hugo; not less for old Julia than for Lorenz Brachmond, at the opposite end of the social scale. It was the whole world even for the returned soldiers, who had traversed great continents and found them less spacious than the small square of Midrans overhung by the green spire of St. Florian.

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It seems to have been outside the compass of Hugo's imagination that the powers he possessed might sensationally or profitably be exercised before a more numerous audience. I have sometimes wondered why it did not for one moment occur to the priest that he might himself, for the glory of God, make use of them. But it is evident that the priest, in the first place, cannot for a single moment have related them with any other source of energy than the Devil. It is possible, even, that he may have learned from his predecessor, a somewhat more scholarly cleric than himself, of the mysterious and abominable pagans who had first set up an altar upon these meadows and chanted here their atrocious litanies. He was aware of certain furtive ceremonies, of occult mumblings. He could not, in the end, dissociate this potency that was unloosed among his people from the elusive unextinguished wickedness, by whatsoever demons generated, which the stream could not wash from the boulders in its bed nor the gales slough clear from the pine branches.

Father Josef had never been very well-disposed towards Hugo. But then, as his enemies pointed out, it was only when a girl tripped by him that he allowed himself to modify the habitual severity of his features. Hugo's bird he definitely disliked. He thought it a godless creature and hated the fuss that was made of it.

The relations of the village with him as man were not the same thing as its relations with him as priest. The affair of the Miracle Boy did not decrease the size of his flock. It no more occurred to Hugo's men not to perform their religious duties as before, than it occurred to them not to feed their cattle or themselves. It was only when later he caused the word to go forth that unless they cast out Hugo from among them, they would be denied all

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consolations and privileges of the Church — it was only then that their spokesman, Herr Prandl and Heinz Abenthum, made it clear to him that the bishop and Rome itself would not thank him for wantonly thrusting into darkness several hundred souls who were committing no sin that bishop or Rome had cognizance of; who were, on the contrary, in a state of more exalted religious passion than had ever been known in Midrans before. It was thereon stated that Father Josef had been misunderstood; and some days later, when the priest was called to one of Hugo's most fervent partisans who lay dying, he abated in no jot the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, even to the anointing of the mouth that coupled in its last mutterings the names of Hugo and Jesus.

It is certain that Father Josef hated almost as much as the Hugo cult itself the thought of the news of it spreading into the world beyond the valley. He was ashamed of it more profoundly than a priest might be of being taken in adultery. This sin was carnal. The other was a sin against the Holy Ghost. And his sense of shame was confounded by the sense of his abysmal impotence. He could not restrain Hugo from working miracles. He could not prevent the working of miracles from its effects upon the villagers of Midrans and the further parishes down the valley. And as he was powerless to check the cult of Hugo living, he was powerless with Hugo dead. What right had he to forbid the peasants from painting in fresco upon their house-fronts a likeness of Hugo and his raven, if it so pleased them, or from surmounting the upright posts of their troughs and fountains with his effigy in wood?

It was precisely this sense of shame that caused him to treat me so savagely that night shortly after my arrival in Midrans, when I asked him, in my innocence, what all this

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business of the painted and carved youth might be. "How dare you?" he had cried, his colossal hands hanging over me like an ape's. "How dare you? Oh, unashamed! unashamed! Go!" But I was to realize that it was he who was ashamed. That was why his huge body fell into a woeful shaking. That was why I saw him pacing forward and backward along the balcony in front of his window, all night long. That was why he blindly shook his fists and bit his finger-nails like a schoolgirl in hysteria. Because of the disgrace, the shame. Because of the insult to himself and to his Lord, and because he could do no more than bury the body of Hugo Harpf, while the soul of Hugo Harpf, staring out of his pale blue undefeated eyes, towered over him wherever he went, a black patch covering his empty eye-socket.

Hugo was not one of the most frantic church-goers among the young men of Midrans. But he attended Mass hardly less regularly than before, for a long time after the miraculous blossoming of the rose-bush in the grassy avenue under Father Josef's house. It was not until the awakening of Jacob Kranz in his coffin that he became one of the village "free-thinkers," whose free-thinking consisted of putting in at the White Lamb the time spent by everyone else at the Florianskirche. He had rather more leisure for drinking than before. That, for a time, seemed to be the only difference it made to him. But there was one Sunday evening when it was noticed that Teresl Walgoni was missing from Benediction, and that her small brothers and sisters, whom she always ushered into church so noisily, had had to find their places for themselves. It was noticed later that Hugo and Teresl came down from the woods together. He lurched casually, a little defiantly,

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into the Bauernstube. She went off home like a girl in a trance. Her eyes were wide. They shone. Her bosom heaved. And this was all somewhat strange. For though scandal had always found something rather scurrilous to say about Teresl Walgoni, despite all the pious clucking with which she ushered the numerous brood of her sisters and brothers into church, Hugo Harpf had never been seen before coming out of the woods with a maiden. Excepting only, in the old days, with Nanni Tratzl; concerning whom not the most foul-minded had ever uttered a smutty word. Chaste as steel or as snow was Nanni Tratzl. They said nothing more venomous of her than that no girl knew more accurately than she what a rare commodity was chastity in the market, and what a price it might command.

And upon the following Sunday it was with Kati Zeiler that Hugo came down from the woods. And she bent down and kissed his hand when he dismissed her; and he laughed good-humouredly and came in and sat down and ordered a half-litre of wine.

It was from Ludl, his younger brother, that I learned how Hugo had deliberately eaten not a morsel of food for three days before the day upon which the cattle were to be brought down from the alp-huts; the day, in fact, when Midrans was to witness the miraculous blooming of the rose-bush. But as the months went by, the youth seems to have found this prelude to his performances, which he must have appreciated less than any other form of preparation, less and less necessary. The flesh that was a barrier between him and the achievements imputed to him became easier to circumvent; until at length he was in immediate communion with the agency that wrought for him. And the flesh, therefore, became in every function a less

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important consideration to him. I should not say consideration, for it is not easy to conceive of Hugo having at any time any self-conscious attitude towards the body and its fitness, such as the life of a townsman forces upon him, if he would keep his body in trim. But it is certain that these days he never joined the youths upon their high mountain sallies, whether upon poaching bent or to pluck the first gentian to trim a sweetheart's Sunday hat. "His breath came short," Ludl said to me, "like this!" And the lad stopped and puffed out his cheeks. This was not surprising. After the starvation of Munich, Hugo devoted himself to the pleasures of the table with an energy that held the generations of his younger brothers spell-bound along both sides of the table, for hours after their own quite imposing appetites were appeased. As for Fanni — that sad lady was not capable of more than a single idea at a time. Upon the day of the miraculous blooming, Hugo, her brother, became everything that Father Josef, the saints, Jesus, Oskar Tachezy, had been to her successively. She did not remember him to be no more than her own mother's son. He walked with a glory about him, and when he spoke, she was dumb with worship. But that did not prevent her from heaping the altar of her devotion with good things. The odours of meats rose like incense. She ministered to him as the priestesses of the sacred beasts of old Nile ministered to their hardly more formidable stomachs. The making of Ramschlögel — veal cutlets with cream sauce, the food he most loved in Midrans and had most sickly yearned for in Munich — became to her a rite to be performed as scrupulously as to any other priest his most complex ceremony. She cut the veal slices as delicately as silk and fried them in butter until they had reached the foreordained brownness. She put them by on

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a hot plate — her instinct had divined even that unprecedented refinement — and mixed a half-pint of cream with the hissing butter in the pan. At length the dish was set before him, drowned in the lovely sauce. And she withdrew a foot or so into the penumbra beyond his glory, and gazed upon him, and upon the raven poking his head down from his shoulder to receive a choice morsel stuck on the end of his knife. And Oskar Tachezy may have been dead already, or might have died the next day. She took the Ramschlögel away and set down a huge plate of three-cornered Mohnkrapfen before him, honey-sweet with currants and drowsy with poppy-seeds.

It was not surprising, then, that his breath came short, like that. . . . In the old days, though he had not eaten much less, his work had carried him miles down the Floriansthal into Schlamms, or over the pass beyond the Teufelswand into the Emmsthal. Nowadays he did no more than stroll away over the slope of the hill eastward beyond the Kalvarienberg, where the quiet larch-wood splintered suddenly into a foam of birches. It was in this region, between these larches and the pines this side of them, that years ago Hansl had come down upon his shoulder, attracted by the yellow glint of his hair. It was upon that day, they said, the power had first entered into him. A power had always been in him, said others, but lately his own and another had joined forces, and nothing in nature could withstand their secret alliance. But the lad sauntered along, with no more than a casual "*Servus*" to anyone who passed him, and he sauntered back again, and set himself down under the stuffed eagle, and his friends commanded a half-litre and another half-litre, and he puffed away at his pipe, till the lids drooped over his blue

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eyes, and the others fell into silence, afraid of disturbing him.

Under the stuffed eagle. And the news came that a golden eagle had hatched out two birds in a cleft of a steely precipice a dozen hours' journey away. And the whole village was agog with excitement, Hugo's men and the priest's men setting off shoulder to shoulder, with ropes and blocks and guns and tackle. But Hugo's breath came short. He sauntered over to the larch-wood and home again to the stuffed eagle his own father had brought down, and he puffed away at the painted chimney-stack of his pipe, till the lids drooped down over his blue wide eyes.

He was less of a hand with a gun these days than he had been as quite a small lad. His grip was not so steady. His eye was not so sure. His body was not the finely-adjusted organism it had been. He performed rarer prodigies than climbing, shooting. True. Yet it was a pity he had made such a miserable show at the butts the other day, at the first march organized since the war ended. The time had been when he could be reckoned on to hit two fourers running; that is to say, the small innermost circle of the bull's-eye, half an inch in diameter. And luck was against him if one of these shots did not carry away the pin's head itself. And now . . . one of his shots had not even hit the board. He was white with fury . . . it was all very well to blame the marker; to swear that young Tambosi was drunk and squinted. But Tambosi himself was white, too. He came up crawling on his belly. He was pasty with fear. He looked all the more miserable in his high felt hat with its hanging ribbons and his patch-work coat and his pantaloons.

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But Hugo merely swung round on his heels, and pushed his way through the onlookers, muttering a word as he passed by into the ear of Teresl Walgoni. The girl followed him, as if the summons had come to her in a waste place and no one had marked it. Ludl was up waiting for him when he returned late that night. So, too, was Fanni, but she betook herself to the kitchen at once to fry a Schmarren for him.

"But tell me, Hugo," Ludl whispered to him somewhat shyly and awkwardly. "Thou wilt not be angry?"

"Speak then!"

"It was a disgrace to us, was it not, that thou shouldst, like an old woman ——"

"I know, I know. Do not say it. But I can do other things!"

"Even so. Thou canst walk upon water."

"And make bread out of gravel."

"And put a clean eye into a socket which was shrivelled."

"Even so. And wine out of sand, Ludl."

"Yes, Hugo. Then, to-day at the shooting — it would have been so easy. And we should not have been disgraced. Why didst thou not each time take away the pin, Hugo?"

"Thou art a little fool, Ludl."

"Why didst thou not? Why didst thou not?"

"It is because I do the things which are impossible, not those which are possible."

"What dost thou mean, Hugo?"

"Things not of the body, Ludl."

"I do not understand, Hugo. What dost thou mean?"

"I mean thou art a little fool, Ludl. Question me no more."

"But ——"

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"I said go, Ludl! Art thou going?"

"Good night, Hugo. Happy rest."

"Good night, little fool."

The majority of the Midransers were not prostrated by the idea of the Miracle Boy who had arisen amongst them. It is not suggested that they took him as a matter of course; but no man, after beholding the miracles for himself, went through a period of speculative inquiry into the nature of phenomena. He spat upon his horny hand. He scratched his shaggy head. He made the sign of the Cross. He went to put a candle before a shrine of the Virgin or the saint who seemed to have most use for him. A few, the taproom intellectuals, gawked and spluttered and rumbled for a time. Then the question became this, and nothing more than this: was it a possession of God or a possession of the Devil?

This was how the matter resolved itself even among the people who were definitely at loggerheads with the priest, and who were so callous in pious observances that they almost ceased to be Christians at all; were hardly to be distinguished from Jews or Protestants. Actually, the main point of difference between these and the others was their view of the private morals of Father Josef. His history before his arrival in Midrans gave their imaginations the fullest scope, but even the ancient hag who kept house for him here gave them some play; nor did Sister Teresa, the mistress of the infants, go quite unscathed. On the other hand these same cynics would no sooner have died without his assistance than they would have lived without the assistance of drink. In these matters, and in a further matter, the whole village was at one. They lived the whole of their lives upon the borderland of the supernatural. The evil eye was a thing as real to them as lightning. Certain

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words or charms were more efficient than others in keeping away the evil eye, certain belfries more efficient than others in keeping away the lightning. Herbs, waters, moments, gestures, had magic properties. Spirits were round the corner, at night, even in the village. In the woods and stony places they might with ill-luck be encountered at any time. The experiences of Julia and Toni among the denizens of pious and impious magic, were as real to them as the experiences of so-and-so on his timber-raft and so-and-so with the bull which had gored him. They were animists, like the early Greeks, though they rendered their credulous poetry into cruder shapes than a legend of Atys or a statue of Apollo. Some deemed the spirits sufficiently appeased in the simple sacrifice of wine and wheat. Some — not even the priest knew who exactly they were, or if they verily existed — slew, blindfold, a bound goat, with wilder and less wild plungings of the knife. Other appeasements of gods earlier than Christ, endured, though they could not say they were performing them; even as certain syllables endured, of tongues earlier than any spoken in their own land or neighbouring lands, and they thought these syllables to be nothing more than the mummery of baby language.

They lived their whole lives upon the borderland of the supernatural. What had now happened was that one of their number had crossed over in the full light of noon, and stood performing miracles there, as nonchalantly as he might mix the bran for his father's beasts, or ram the tobacco into his pipe-bowl.

It was simple. Either God or the Devil had led him there, was at his right hand. Some said this thing and some the other. Someone brought down a word from the rocky desolation towards the glacier, where Franz Holzhammer

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dug and sweated and shouted prayers. A Son of God, he had said, and struck the floor with the stout timber of his forehead.

A Son of God . . . the Black One himself, the Damned One. Hugo's men and the priest's men glowered at each other. They worked and drank and lusted, they carved saints, they stole game. But there was no fighting in Midrans now, as there had always been before! Woe on the day when there should be fighting!

The situation was simple to the majority of the Midransers, but not so simple for Lorenz Brachmond, the Burgermeister, or Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster. What sort of a devil was this, what sort of a saint? One or the other he must be, must he not, who had in him to do such things? For they did not doubt, any more than Tall Toni, his doing them. They did not share with von Felsenburg the theory that it was all a form of legerdemain, which the Herr Baron had expounded incessantly, almost insanely. He had honoured them with his company more often in a month than in all their lifetimes before. But it was not their social graces he was interested in. He had exposed the thieving blackguard, the impertinent jackanapes, the lump of ordure, with a wealth of erudition which would have staggered more accustomed heads than theirs. He pursued the fakes, the frauds, throughout history, from the fabrications of the Egyptian and Greek oracles, to the latest metapsychiatry of Prague and Paris. His voice shrilled in spirals of hysteria. Little Amrain sweated like a pig. Brachmond concealed a wink under his yard-brush eyebrows.

But he, Hugo Harpf, they said to themselves, was not a *thieving* blackguard, anyhow. There was no question of gold, even the gold that, surely, he could have heaped up

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for himself in heaps like stooks of hay. Night and day old Franz Harpf had querulously commanded his son to make gold, gold, gold. His son had done no more than stare at him rather oddly, rather angrily; until, one day, when the old man had been more than usually stubborn and petulant, Hugo had thrust the old man's head back against the wall and nearly crushed his nose into his face.

Sad business, old Harpf going to bits like a piece of foul cloth, since the very day he had buried the woman he had had as much delight in beating as in sleeping with. You might think that all he had been worth, and the dead woman too, had somehow gone over into the marrow of the lad, the miracle-worker.

A devil? A saint? No, the strange thing was he remained a *Bauer* — a peasant to his core. No, not quite. He had no avarice. Money, possessions, did not appeal to him, though all the kingdoms of the world might be his. In so much he was no peasant, no Midranser. But for the rest he was the lad he had always been, changed in some ways, deteriorated; but time does not leave any of us as we were, and if he was less of a hand with a gun these days, he was more of a buck with the women.

Oh, yes. He would have his maiden again, his Nanni Tratzl. To-morrow or the next day. Or had he had her on her back already, she who had been like an icicle for chastity? As he had himself been, too, if the truth were told. There had not been many others like him. Strange it all was, strange.

For if it was God who possessed him; if he was, to put it in recognizable language, a saint — was there ever less saintly a saint? Or less devilish a devil? His imagination remained the imagination of a peasant. The miracles were

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those miracles which any peasant had heard of, and would perform, were the astounding power to come down upon him. If he were in a good temper, he was obliging. He would heal sicknesses of skin and stomach. He would move a tree whose roots were sucking up all the manure in a peasant's yard.

But when he was once asked to slay the rats in somebody's barn, he said crossly that slaying was not his business; and that, anyway, brute beasts were beyond the scope of his ministrations; and when he was asked again, he playfully converted all the grain in the barn into sand. (I cannot forbear from pausing at this point to draw attention again to the curious insusceptibility to Hugo's miracles in which the accounts isolate all non-human creatures. When Hansl was dying in Munich, Hugo is represented as being able to achieve nothing for him. There is no account of his healing sick cattle, or of any miracle in which any sort of animal was in any way involved. Is it a thing of no significance that only dead matter and human intelligence had the appearance of being responsive to him? But I have promised to deny myself the luxury of speculation.)

I resume. He was capricious as a child, but not one of those holy children of whom priests tell. He spent no long nights upon his knees, did not mortify his flesh with whips, carried no ecstasy in his eyes. The raven that had always been with him was with him always now. But there was no spirit in the bird. He did not flurry down to tweak a dog's tail or a cat's ear. He hardly moved from Hugo's shoulder, his head lay slackly upon his own black bosom. But the eyes were watchful as before. It was as if he expected something evil to befall his master. He hardly ever

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parted his beak, excepting to eat or drink; very rarely, as of old, to caw joyously or derisively. It was a silent vigilant bird perched on the Miracle Boy's shoulder.

A devil then? A saint? Brachmond stroked his great beard. Amrain wiped his clammy brow.

And then von Felsenburg announced that three Miracle Men — no mere callow amateurs, but grown men, eminent, almost supreme, in their profession — were on their way to Midrans. By God, how the fools would blush for their stupidity now! To have been taken in by such penny-a-time tomfoolery. *Sacrament!* They would have something to stare at and cackle over. Three Miracle Men — and at colossal expense. (Conrad von Felsenburg had speculated rather agilely in inflated currencies. Earlier von Felsenburgs had speculated in deflated mercenaries. Money has to be made from century to century.)

"But why," asked Amrain, as the two descended from the Felsenburg, "why will he not permit himself to look on for himself when young Harpf performs the strangenesses? Why?"

"Can it be," speculated Brachmond, "that he is afraid? That he will not be able to doubt any longer, any more than you or I? It cannot be that. No. Perhaps, even, there is something in what he says."

"You think?" asked little Amrain hopefully. "Perhaps? Who knows? These new ones, the Miracle Men, perhaps they will help us all to understand? You think?"

"But what," said Brachmond, "is there to understand?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

IT must be said at once that the Miracle Men were a failure. Not of course, as an entertainment. It is not to be expected that these distinguished gentlemen, who had swept everything before them in half a dozen capitals, were not capable of impressing the lumpy intelligences of the Midransers. From some points of view they could never have had a more gratifying audience than that which attended their first performance. On their second, they exposed themselves with more or less good humour. They did not expose Hugo Harpf. Their professional rival was not invited to witness their performances. Had he advanced a step beyond the outer gate of the Felsenburg, the Baron would have set his dogs at his throat. For the sum total of the labours so expensively performed by the Miracle Men was to increase von Felsenburg's already intolerable rancour against the young peasant. The attitude of the Midransers towards their own Miracle Boy was not in the slightest degree affected.

It is not to their discredit that the three illustrious magicians could only be coaxed from their metropolitan engagements on the payment of very substantial fees. Audiences had never been so responsive as these of post-war, superficially so cynical, fundamentally so credulous. That consideration did not affect Mr. Sylvester so much as his colleagues from Bengal and Tunisia. Mr. Sylvester had a

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small theatre in Oxford Street, in London, and the attitude underlying his entertainment was that we are all very jolly and witty fellows, and it is no more than an accident that I am on this side of the platform, performing these illusions, and you are in the auditorium, looking at them, but not for a moment being taken in by them. Nothing so vulgar. Those of us who were not educated at the ancient Universities were educated at Sandhurst. We are all very jolly and witty, but, essentially, we are gentlemen.

Mr. Sylvester was, in fact, a very urbane and well-groomed young man, who sang and danced not less well than he performed illusions or than the *matinée* idols at the neighbouring theatres sang and danced. He wore an impeccable dress-suit and an eye-glass, and was rather less successful than his colleagues. He could not perform his tricks without a barrage of public-school banter, and as the Midransers could not understand English nor he translate his winsome rhetoric into *Tirolese* German, he did not repeat his Oxford Street successes. The Midransers did not like his smile nor his small perfect moustaches nor his eye-glass, though they approved of the lady in span-gled tights whom he shot, decapitated and reassembled. The things they said about that thoroughly pleasant young man, about the conjectural character of his mother, the nature of his personal indulgences, would have hurt that young man unspeakably.

Hassan Bey, who was stated on his handbills to be an Aissouïah from the oasis of Medenine in Tunisia, was more successful with his audience than Mr. Sylvester. He, too, talked a foreign language, which was understood to be the Tunisian variant of Arabic; but he did not talk it so much as howl it. He could not summon enough physical

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energy to perform the miracles he was contributing to the symposium without a very long and arduous preparation; and the Midransers appreciated the preparation almost as much as the miracles themselves. He, too, had his staff with him; but Ahmed and Ali, his two dusky lads from the Sahara (though, to be sure, I have subsequently heard they were bath-attendants from Batignolles, in Paris) were not so popular as Mr. Sylvester's pink-tighted lady. The preparation consisted in the rendering by Ahmed and Ali of the most ear-splitting music on two Saharan instruments, a drum and a sort of bagpipes. Wilder and wilder swirled the pipes, heavier and heavier thudded the drum, more and more entranced became Hassan Bey. He projected his head further and further from his shoulders, wilder and wilder gleamed his eyes. Until suddenly he uttered a frantic yell, leapt to his feet and proceeded to dance. The yell frightened Midrans out of its wits. It yelled in concord. Poor Frau Zwicker, who was not more than eight months gone with child, kept on yelling spasmodically, and had to be removed. She gave birth to her child that same night. But Hassan Bey danced and danced and danced as if the tawny wastes of his own desert spread about his feet eastward to the Gulf of Gabes and westwards to the mountains of Atlas. Over his head were suspended the palm-branches of Medenine. Midrans had thought it knew something about dancing before; there had been weddings at which the dancing had gone on continuously for twenty or thirty hours. But they realized that their visitor from Africa put more energy into his dancing in a couple of hours than the whole village did in a week. And still the pipes squealed and the drum thudded and the Aissouïah danced; and only the awe of knowing themselves to be in the Felsenburg under the

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eye of the Herr Baron himself prevented them from knocking the benches backward and whirling round to the insidious and irresistible rhythm. But the Herr Baron, leaning against the platform he had rigged up where the altar used to be, was getting more and more fidgety. He was biting his lips angrily, clearing his throat, beating his foot upon the floor. He chewed to rags the handkerchief he had held to his nose all the time. He glared at Ahmed and Ali, but it was no use; it was as much as their job was worth to let the music trail off until they received their signal from their master, whether this was some purely spiritual indication or a mere gross movement of eyelid or thumb.

Fortunately, Hassan Bey also had come to the conclusion that he had generated a sufficient store of metapsychical energy. Quivering, sweating, his eyeballs rolling, he proceeded to go through his repertoire. He thrust a sword through his abdomen which came out through the small of his back. He buried knives wherever his sparse bones carried enough flesh to bury them in. In a state of rigidity he was deposited by his assistants upon the points of a large number of nails knocked through a wooden framework. There was only one item in his usual programme he did not execute. He did not eat scorpions. The Midransers did not know that scorpion-eating is the most essential feature in an Aissouïah's exercises, and they would hardly have dared to insist on it, if they had known. Unfortunately, there are no scorpions in Tirol, and Hassan Bey had assured von Felsenburg that the stock of scorpions he had brought with him from the Sahara had been lost in transit. He was reluctantly forced to charge his highness for the same, for a poor Aissouïah could not be expected to incur the loss himself. His highness seemed to remem-

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ber that the beasts were, if anything, too cheap in the desert, but he paid up. It was no use arguing about details. He thereupon suggested that Hassan Bey would produce the same stupefaction upon his audience in Midrans if he devoured a plateful of cockroaches. Hassan Bey was furious at the suggestion. It insulted his honour as a Muslim and an Aissouïah. He would eat no cockroaches.

The performance of Chaman Dall was, on the whole, on this occasion, the most successful. His handbills described him as a Fakir from Bengal. He was wrapped in white garments as voluminous as Hassan Bey's loin-cloth was sparse. The women Midransers were, it might be stated, profoundly shocked, for a time, by Hassan Bey's nudity, and they kept their eyes averted from him until the music of the pipes and drum got the better of them, too, and their own heavy feet thudded out the rhythm upon the floor. But the only part of himself that Chaman Dall permitted you to see was his eyes. Turban and robes swathed all the rest of him. Yet somehow his eyes, as he gazed from member to member of his audience, seemed more naked, more obscene, than a bevy of loose women. It was hardly possible to gather from his audience what exactly he had done for their entertainment. Some said they merely sat and dreamed, and they had seen nothing at all. Some swore that they saw a lion bounding towards them from the small room which had once been the sacristy. They were too rigid with horror to stir a finger, but fortunately the lion bounded out through the door, and was not heard of again. Yet all seemed to remember how he had unbound a rope girdle from his waist, thrown it into the air and sent a small brown mite shinning up it till at length he disappeared in the ceiling somewhere.

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They had not seen the child previously. They did not see him again. This was curious, because, later, Ahmed and Ali and the lady in the pink tights, all more soberly attired, were seen several times in the village, talking and laughing together like any other foreigners. The small brown child had disappeared as completely as a cloud.

The performance came to an end. It did not seem tactful, or dignified, to von Felsenburg to follow it with a lecture of exposition at that moment. His awkward and shambling guests were taken in hand by Huber and led into the refectory, where wine and Schnapps and cake awaited them. They ate and drank silently, all in the magnificent Trachten, the Floriansthal costume, reserved for high occasions. They passed out into the courtyard, shuffling over the cobbles. Conrad von Felsenburg stood at the window of his study and waved an easy and condescending hand to them. They doffed their broad ceremonial hats. The women curtseyed, till their brocade aprons swept the ground. "Kiss the hand!" they mumbled. He turned away to his desk, meditating. But when the peasants found themselves on the twisting path that led down towards the square, Hans Wappens was heard to growl out a few words which Conrad von Felsenberg may, or may not, have found reassuring.

"Mother of Jesus," said he, "the man takes us for mules!"

"A mule himself!" said Willi Streli, disrespectfully.

But several others seemed hardly to know what they were doing. A woman stumbled and tore her silk apron on a jut of rock. But she did no more than rub her eyes, as if she had just got out of bed, still more than half-asleep.

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"The man takes us for mules!" growled Ludl Schnegg, who looked more like a mule than the next man. It seems likely that von Felsenburg would have found those words very reassuring. They indicated precisely the frame of mind he wanted his Miracle Men to disseminate. If only the Midransers could allow themselves to fulfil the logical implications of the idea. If these three men, or himself, their stage manager, might be accused of treating them mulishly, surely they must perceive the affront that Hugo Harpf was putting on them by his impertinent tricks. The affront was surely the more grave in so much as young Harpf was one of themselves. He flattered himself that he had provided them with a rather skilfully organized exhibition of the arts of illusion. These arts themselves might further be subdivided into two classes. On the one hand was the class of false and fabricated illusion, like Mr. Sylvester's decapitating of the lady; on the other, was the illusion which was no illusion at all. Yet this type of trick was as staggering to the audience as any illusion in the other class, merely because the audience was not aware that with courage or training they were capable of precisely the same feats. An admirable instance of the illusion-which-was-no-illusion was Hassan Bey's transfixing of his body with knives. Certain parts of the body, as the cognoscenti in this type of performance know, can be thus transfixed without any sort of danger. Others can not; and these parts Hassan Bey had no more than plastered with fake knives. The sword he had run through his body, it need not be said, was merely one of the more ingenious of his toys. The nailed board also was no fake.

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With a little training in what the experts called pseudo-cataplexy, any member of the audience could have done the trick. Hassan Bey's performance throughout was a subtle compound of these two types of illusion. He had not, in point of fact, swallowed the pint of boiling lead. But he had actually swallowed every bit of glass and metal which he had lapped up from his plate with such hideous noises. The blood that had streamed from his mouth, on the other hand, was no more than red ink squeezed out of a sponge.

A very competent Miracle Man was Hassan Bey. Mr. Sylvester was no less competent. But he made it quite clear that he would not deceive his amiable friends for worlds. Not for worlds. It was all a pure question of carpentry and mechanics. Chaman Dall, the Fakir from Bengal, was at the opposite pole of illusionism. His sole engineering was his eyes.

Conrad slit the tip of his cigar, and sat back in his easy swivel-chair more comfortably than he had done since the affair, at once so ludicrous and so exasperating, of the village mountebank began.

All that was now necessary was to let a gentle hint percolate down to them of how it had all been done. They might as well rack their own thick wits for a week or two. It would do them no harm. And then another séance, or perhaps two, would clinch the matter.

How the tow-haired lout must be quaking in his shoes, he thought. He poured himself out a tumbler of cognac.

But the tow-haired lout was not. Martin Huber was unable to report to his master that the young man was looking particularly disconcerted. He did not think it discreet to add that Hugo Harpf did not even seem very interested. The whole village was, of course, agog with

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excitement. Such incredible pantomime had never been heard of or conceived in the Floriansthal. More sophisticated communities might have found it just as amazing; they might even have been more satisfactorily amazed than the Midransers seemed to be. A feeling of irritation, even more than gratitude or bewilderment, began to assert itself as the prevalent emotion. They felt they had been made fools of. They disliked particularly the bland gentleman from England. They disliked his eye-glass. Then they recollected the more formidable eyes of his Indian colleague. These, on reflection, they not merely disliked; they found them abominable. Two women and a boy had vomited within two hours after the entertainment. Others felt queasy. It was all due, undoubtedly, to the black man's queer and loathly eyes. And then the dancing one, the one that had stuck knives into himself all over—it was disgusting. Such an exhibition of dirty heathen flesh before a company of honest Tirolese wives and virgins! The most ferocious lechers were loudest in their condemnation. And Father Josef did not see how he could possibly withhold his voice from the shocked chorus.

Altogether the fact that they were foreigners helped neither the Miracle Men nor von Felsenburg. It was intolerable that foreigners should come along and make fools of them half the time and cast an evil eye on them the other half of time. The lord of the Felsenburg had spent too little time among his peasants, or had too profound a contempt for them, to understand their psychology. He had, in fact, precisely miscalculated it. It was because Hugo Harpf was one of themselves, because they had known him from childhood, that the idea of trickery on his part had hardly been entertained at all. They had felt

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perhaps, on the occasion of the blooming of the rose-bush, that they had all been victims of some sort of delusion, himself not least. Perhaps, even, he had somehow assisted the delusion. But the idea did not persist long. Jesus was in him, Satan was in him — this was the self-evident truth of it. It was not the first time that God or Devil had come down into the bones of a man or stood, invisible, over against his left shoulder, instructing him to perform marvels.

Hugo Harpf did not seem particularly interested. He walked over to Hansl's pine-wood and then to the larch-wood beyond, lit dimly by its green candles. It was mid-summer. He hurled himself down upon a bank of cowslips and violets, more odorous than roses or lime-blossom.

The sentiments of the three Miracle Men regarding their formidable rival can hardly be divined; partly because they held no conversation with anybody in Midrans on the subject, partly because they could only have expounded their sentiments in English, Arabic or Bengali (always assuming that the native language of all three was not English) and chiefly, perhaps, because even if they had desired and been able to discuss Hugo in Tirolese German, the whole village cold-shouldered them very markedly. The Midransers resented them. They could not bear Mr. Sylvester's Savile Row tweeds, and though Hassan Bey was more seemlily attired when he walked in the village than when he danced upon the stage, to the Midransers his turban and swathings, and Chaman Dall's, were an offensive foolery. Mr. Sylvester's lady assistant was not looked at so surlily. It is even rumoured that Ludl Schnegg had his will of her, and that the lady herself was not too coy. But what seems more certain is that

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Mr. Sylvester attempted, through this same lady, to add another assistant to his staff. The lady did not speak German, but Mr. Sylvester no doubt felt she could convey her meaning. How Hugo Harpf responded to her invitations and Mr. Sylvester's is not known; but Mr. Sylvester cannot be blamed for thinking that the extraordinary young man would have been a notable addition to the attractions of his small theatre in Oxford Street.

The day came when it seemed to the Herr Baron that he had allowed the process of fermentation to go sufficiently far. It was his intention, upon this second performance, to have those tricks repeated which had seemed most powerful in their effects. There would, of course, be a certain number of new illusions. But the *pièce de résistance* should be the scientific exposure of the whole performance, to be delivered by the Miracle Men themselves, himself deigning to be the interpreter. Unfortunately the gentlemen did not view his suggestion with the ready favour he had anticipated. They were, in fact, exceedingly awkward, excepting Mr. Sylvester. Justice should be done to Mr. Sylvester. He only became awkward a little later in the proceedings, when the two others impressed upon him the fact that the opportunity was here presented them to double or treble the handsome emoluments they were to receive. Von Felsenburg's suggestion had not perturbed him. In fact, one of the most amiable features of his entertainment was his running exposure of his own illusions. But as the exposures rendered the mysteries even more mysterious than they had seemed, the result was merely that his audience was flattered, and himself considered altogether a charming dog.

But the Fakir and the Aissouïah had neither his suavity nor his sense of humour nor even his clarity of mind. The

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mountain air and the unaccustomed diet confused them a little, and they were not certain whether, to some extent, von Felsenburg did not deny to them those powers . . . how might they put it . . . he looked so dangerous . . . the powers they possessed, which, so to term it, were not strictly in the order of nature. But this hinted pretension evoked from him a storm of wrath a hundred times more furious than any of his remonstrances against their most outrageous charges. They changed their ground promptly. They had merely meant to suggest that it was as much as their living was worth if they gave away their secrets, with aspirants to supernatural honours poking about in every market-place. That was an argument which could be countered; and, most expensively, it was.

The real difficulty he did not express to them, and he hastily sent a man to Innsbruck to buy up a commodity which might solve it for him, all the oriental incense he could lay hands on. The accumulated stench of so much peasant flesh had almost asphyxiated him, though he had armed himself with a handkerchief steeped in scent. He almost heaved now at the memory of it, their flesh, the dried sweat on their clothes, the smell of the food they had eaten. The indignity of the whole proceeding began to sicken him more and more. Never had such an assembly of peasants entered the arrogant portals of the Felsenburg before. In smaller companies they had been haled up, in earlier centuries, to be horsewhipped or thrust into dungeons. But the history of that ancient house offered no parallel to this new entertainment — of a Baron von Felsenburg issuing invitations to his peasants, like any Lutheran pastor in North Germany inviting his flock to a Sunday afternoon treat. He winced with the disgrace of it. He presented to himself the withering laughter which

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the news would evoke among his polite acquaintance in Stockholm or Madrid. It was this impudent dolt, this foul-breathed peasant conjuror, who was responsible for it all. He was not aware how he clenched his fist and showed his teeth, sitting alone there, among his books. He blinked uneasily. He filled his tumbler again. The creature was becoming an *idée fixe*. It was altogether indecorous, unhumorous. He laughed somewhat rawly. Indeed, indeed, he must take himself in hand.

As for the girl, Christ in Hell, he had accepted her excuse for not coming to the first performance. Some clap-trap about her father dying. It was about time he got some reward for the rings, the brooches, the amethyst necklace. He thumped his fist on the table. The amethyst necklace was a favourite jewel of his mother. Had the slut bewitched him? He had sent it over with the other things, as if it were of little more account than a length of dog-chain. It was true he owed the young harlot some sort of apology for the way he had sent her packing. Or did he? Young harlot, did he say? By God, he'd strumpet her! He'd turn her over when he'd finished with her to any sot from the pigsties who wanted her. Bad blood, bad blood in her veins! It was not many days ago he had seen her mother — sure enough, it was her mother; he recognized one of the brooches he had given the daughter gleaming on the hag's bosom — he had seen the mother disappearing into a thicket with that notorious poacher, Zeiler, whom all Huber's traps had not yet succeeded in snaring. And the man Tratzl dying, his daughter had said. He'd show the wench whether he would allow himself to be treated like this for any sick dog of a peasant. He'd have the tongue out of her mouth first. He sat down and wrote her a short peremptory note. She was on no account to

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be absent from the second entertainment, fixed for the morrow. He sent Anna over, his housekeeper. After all, the whole business had been organized, in a sense, for her special benefit. When he once knocked the nonsense out of her bemused little head — her rather pretty little head, if the truth were told — the rest should be easy. She had more brains in her head than the whole thundering village, Burgermeister, schoolmaster, priest, included.

But Nanni Tratzl, said Anna, returning nearly an hour later, grunting and indignant, refused to see her. Nanni Tratzl shut the door in her face. Nanni Tratzl was a stinking sow. She could do no more than thrust the note under the door. Nanni Tratzl was a lump of dirt.

“Quiet!” thundered von Felsenburg. “How darest thou fill the air with thy garbage? A pox on thee, whore’s-bones!”

But Nanni Tratzl was not present next day at Conrad von Felsenburg’s village treat.

If he had dared, Martin Huber could have informed his master a week or two earlier that the prospects for the second tea-party were not bright. He had been requested to pack the chapel with as representative a crowd as possible of the public opinion and intelligence of the village. Even on the first occasion it had not been so easy as von Felsenburg had anticipated. The villagers did not break each other’s necks in the struggle to get asked. They were a surly and suspicious race. What was it he had up his sleeve? The Baron was no darling among apprehensive mothers. Husbands he had long ago preceded or cuckolded did not regard him affectionately. And the Felsenburg awe which had hung over the village for so many centuries was a rather tattered and threadbare thing in the wind of

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the revolution that had blown fitfully even into these last recesses of the Floriansthal.

It was with very great difficulty that Huber managed to get any sort of crowd at all for the second entertainment. The rumour had gone forth into the village that the Indian magician had the evil eye. A calf that had passed within a few feet of him when he was out strolling in the village one afternoon took cold, and, despite a liberal sprinkling with holy water, died a few days later. Father Josef had found it as much as he could manage on the first occasion to stifle his objections and put in an appearance. He thought it abominable that the chapel, even though a Mass had not been said in it for many a long day, should be prostituted to the use of heathen conjurors. The objection was carried to von Felsenburg, for an important section of the audience would follow the priest's lead in the matter. But it seemed that the chapel, with the sacristy leading out behind the rigged-up proscenium, suited the necessities of the magicians perfectly. Father Josef managed to stifle his reluctance for the first entertainment. Unluckily, on the morning of the second performance, he developed a violent toothache. By the distribution of a lot of secret largess, in the way of Schnapps and tobacco, Huber managed to get in some sort of a crowd. There were very few women, not because the majority of them were with child and feared a premature delivery, but because those who were not, feared they might be, and the evil eye was a disaster not to be risked lightly. It was altogether a more uncouth audience — returned soldiers, hard-bitten and cynical, drunkards already half sodden, and a sprinkling of zanies and poachers, the zanies being the only members of the audience who were as impressed as they ought to have been to find themselves guests at the

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Felsenburg. The poachers were not insensitive to the delicious humour of the situation. Last night, with blackened faces and masks over their eyes, they had been crawling on their bellies in von Felsenburg's preserves. To-day they were the Herr Baron's guests. They wore an expression of bland and affecting simplicity.

All these details von Felsenburg rehearsed later without mitigation. The bile of humiliation rose in his throat. No von Felsenburg had ever so humiliated himself before. He had descended to the level of the filthiest swine-herd. His eyes blazed for the blood of Hugo Harpf.

The three magicians were not at their ease. They were adepts at judging the precise psychological state of their audiences, and here they sniffed antipathy in the air like sulphur. The Indian was the most anxious. Out in the village, and in the woods, he had more than once been hit by a clot of manure flung by some invisible hand. Had his audience brought any ammunition? He was not certain whether he would be able to get his influences under way before they discharged it at him. He was thoroughly miserable. Mr. Sylvester was pained. It all seemed so ungentlemanly, so grammar-school. He fumbled his illusions. The pink-tighted lady was very nearly decapitated in good earnest. She shrieked. That particular illusion was more successful than it had ever been. But for the rest of his performance Mr. Sylvester was watery at the knees.

The whole performance was attended by a running commentary of exposition from the high-well-born-one. To the peasants it merely seemed that von Felsenburg had thrown himself into their own frame of mind, and was baiting the poor foreigners. They guffawed. The Baron glared. He continued his exposition severely. Those who were drunk faltered a little and then guffawed more up-

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roariously. They had never seen anything in their lives so comic as a naked gentleman pushing knives into himself all over. So they had Trotters in foreign parts too! But the foreign ones were infinitely more demented and more amusing than the native specimens. Those who were not drunk, became more nervous than before. Added to the possible horrors of the evil eye, was the certain wrath of the Herr Baron, which still could express itself in vague but powerful ways. They fingered their rosaries more feverishly than before, feeling dimly that the more prayers they managed to gabble the more fortified they might be against onslaught.

The trouble was that there is no trick in the world, however masterly it seems when its secret is not understood, which does not seem incredibly jejune when its secret is betrayed. Even a sophisticated intelligence feels itself badly let down when it perceives by what simple means it has been hoodwinked. Conrad von Felsenburg had overlooked this peculiarity in the human composition. When he expounded to the Midransers exactly how they had been imposed on, he did not anticipate that they would delude themselves into believing they had seen through the illusion for themselves. It seemed preposterous to them that the foreigners should imagine they could impose on them by such babyish futilities. The shrieks of laughter were now mingled with hoarse growls of wrath. And then Hassan Bey whipped them to fury. They had thought it funny to see him sticking knives into himself; and when they saw him swallowing platefuls of broken glass, the spectacle enchanted them. Here was a degree of imbecility so monumental that they sat silent as children, gaping. When the blood streamed from his mouth, they could not refrain from uttering murmurs of sympathy. He was no

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Christian, but after all, he was a human creature. And then, with a crowning obtuseness, von Felsenburg requested Hassan Bey to spit out the sponge and squeeze the last drops of red ink upon the floor. The room was in an uproar at once. The hubbub did not subside for five or ten minutes, though Huber and the rest of von Felsenburg's staff bawled till their throats cracked. Von Felsenburg, to keep his face, was forced to retreat into the sacristy. It was infamous! Infamous! His lips writhed and twisted. The curtain fell. When the clamour had more or less died down, he had it drawn up again. Hassan Bey was once more revealed, making preparations to devour a pint of boiling lead. The returned soldiers were now quite out of hand. They filled the air with whistles and cat-calls. Hassan Bey flung himself off the stage in a frantic temper. The Baron had two or three of the most obstreperous ex-soldiers ejected. The Fakir, trembling in every limb, made his appearance. He sat and stared. His audience sat and stared back. A few said later they had a sense of a film forming before their eyes and hazy figures swaying on the stage. But the figures were given no time to become more substantial. Somebody started a lewd chorus. One after another the rest joined in.

"Silence!" thundered von Felsenburg.

"Silence!" howled Martin Huber.

But the end of the domination of the house of Felsenburg had come. The chorus swelled louder and louder, more and more contemptuous. The Fakir rose suddenly from his seat and showed his teeth, malevolently, like a cur. Shaking both fists at the ceiling, he swept off the stage into the sacristy. Nobody remembered to let down the curtain.

Still singing, the crowd thrust its way from the chapel

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into the courtyard and so out through the iron-studded gate. The voices dwindled as the peasants crowded down the twisting roadway. They were silent by the time they had reached the square. What had happened? What was this they had done? They knew only vaguely. Revolution had come at length into Midrans. But they did not phrase it so. They shambled into the White Lamb and threw their hats down and bawled for drink. Up in the refectory at the Felsenburg, the table was loaded with wine and Schnapps and cake. Anna and the kitchen-maids got roaring drunk that night.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IT was altogether pestilential that the man Tratzl should get himself ill this particular summer. It meant that another girl had been sent up to the Tratzl alphut with the cattle, for Nanni could not be spared from the house in Midrans. The whole business would have been over long ago, if he'd had her up in the hut again. Screwed up, discarded like an old dish-clout, she'd have been fodder by now for half a dozen village bucks, the tow-haired one among the rest, if he wanted her. What did the sweaty lusts of these boors concern him?

An idea occurred to him suddenly one day, when, descending from the hills with a gun on his back, he once again saw the girl's mother slope off into the woods with the poacher, Zeiler, her lover. If the boy Seppl were at home, a word would send him scuttling. The old man would be groaning upstairs. He'd have it out with her.

He had a big score to reckon up. The least of her offences was the blasted impertinence with which she had shut the door in the face of his messenger. Did she think she had a sixteen-year-old goatherd sniffing about her petticoats? Jesus Christ, he would make her squeal her apologies!

He crossed the woods obliquely where they hung over the further end of the village, rising up behind the Kalvarienberg. He descended upon the road not many yards away from the dejected Tratzl house, once an inn, that

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had seemed for a century to mourn the gaiety which had so soon been stifled there, when the sign of the Wild Man was set up by an earlier Tratzl. He crossed the road swiftly and went round to the back of the house. He stared cautiously into the kitchen window. She was not there. He opened the door silently and walked through the kitchen into the living-room. The labourers had not come in from the fields for their evening meal. The boy was away skylarking somewhere. She herself was evidently at the bedside of her father.

He had guessed correctly. A few moments later he heard her light feet descending. She opened the door, holding a basin in her hands, containing some sort of gruel, untouched.

“Nanni!”

She started. Her mind swivelled violently from the petulant old man, croaking in his bed. He would not eat. He would not drink. What was the good of eating, he said, if he brought it all up again? It was a needless extravagance. Where was her mother? Had Seppl found enough mushrooms for their dinner next day? She was aware, not that the man who desired her stood a few feet away, beyond the plain scrubbed table. It was the Baron von Felsenburg who stood there, tall and lean and erect, with the slightly crooked nose. She curtsied.

“Kiss the hand!” she mumbled.

“What is this nonsense? I am in no mood for nonsense! At once! Here, I say!”

“What does the Herr Baron desire?”

“Thou simpering little fool! Dost thou think I can be deceived by this prancing and darting away? I said come here!”

“I am busy!”

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"Not time enough for a kiss! Damn thee, here at once! Give me thy mouth!"

"My father is ill! He is very weak!"

"It is not thy father I was asking for!"

"Please, Herr Baron!"

"Cease that stupidity! Pox take thee! I ceased to be thy Herr Baron long enough ago!"

"As you desire, Herr!"

"Not Herr," he said savagely. "Conrad! Conrad!" His voice rose into a shriek. His exacerbad nerves were running away with him. He bit his lip fiercely.

"Conrad!" she said dully, obediently.

"Come here!" he said.

She came over.

"Kiss me!" he said.

"My father is ill!"

"Kiss me!"

He bent down towards her hungrily. She placed two cold lips on his mouth.

"Fire and brimstone! I said kiss me! Like this, baggage! Like this! Like this!" He screwed his mouth into her cold mouth. He pursued the smooth slopes of her cheek, her brows, he came back unappeased to her lips.

"Damn thee!" he cried. "Wake up!"

But she did not open her eyes. Her arms drooped, like a doll's.

"Why didst thou not come?" he stormed. "What have I done, little bitch, what have I done?" He punctuated his words with hot kisses. "Why dost thou not answer! *Hurenslarven!* Why dost thou not answer! Speak! Dost thou know who I am?"

"Yes," she said. "I shall speak to thee another time! Not to-day!"

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"To-day! To-day!" he blazed. "Enough of this! I will not be treated so! By God, I will not be treated so! Take me round with thine arms, I say!" She put her arms flaccidly round his neck. He crushed her fiercely to his breast. The storms of desire arose in him. Her pale cheeks whipped him. Her hair was like the fumes of drink. He breathed heavily, his breath was on her neck. "Now!" he whispered. "Nanni, oh, Nanni, now!"

She became conscious in one wild moment of her peril. She tore herself from his embrace, and shrieked at him. Her bosom heaved. Her eyes were like bright coals.

"Get out! Get out! I did not call you! I do not want you! I hate you!"

"Thou hatest me, slut?" he said. "Ho! Thou hatest me!" He padded towards her carefully. She whipped round behind the table. "Is it that lump of filth with the tow-hair thou lovest? Well, to-morrow thou mayst go to him! To-day thou shalt have another lover!" He placed his hands on the edge of the table and looked down at her from where he towered above the bare scrubbed boards.

"To-morrow thou mayst go the way of thy mother, thy pretty mother. But to-night thou shalt be my faithful little wife. Yes, yes, the fiend take thee! Thou art juicy enough! Thou hast sweet breasts!"

"Herr von Felsenburg," she said. "My father is dying in the room above. Leave me, in the name of Mary Mother!"

"Let her son work miracles!" said he. "There have been miracles enough, have there not, in this place?"

"I do not love you, Herr Baron! I was a fool and a liar!"

"I ask thee no question of loving or not loving. Come to me, pretty one!"

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"I bid thee go, Herr Baron!"

"Go?" he cried. "No, my rabbit, I shall not go! Hush, thou squealer, or I'll strangle thee!"

His hand was over her mouth. He had thrust himself in one fierce movement across the width of the table. He had been too quick for her. His arm was about her like a vice. He slithered from the table and carried her with him to a bench in the corner, under the crucifix adorned with its pods of maize.

"It were best not to struggle, little calf! Hush now, pretty!"

It was in his mouth that his heart seemed to be pounding, not under his ribs. He almost swooned for lust. "Ah, now!" he said. He was aware of a sudden scorching down his cheeks, as if two red-hot coals had slid down them. She had scratched the flesh from the bone. She was through the door like a wind. He heard the door in the upper room slammed and the great wooden bolt pulled to. In a few seconds he too was there, tugging at the door-handle, hammering at the panels like a drunkard.

"Thou slut!" he shrieked. "Let me in! Thou wilt rue the day! Let me in! I will have the door down! Whore's face! Open! Open, I say!"

He heard her speaking. "Louder!" he howled. "I cannot hear! I do not wish to hear! Open the door, bitch!"

"Herr von Felsenburg!" she said. "My father is dying!"

"An ague rot his bones! Let him die! Come out! Christ in Hell!" He hurled his shoulder against the stout door, but it did not budge an inch. He hammered with his fists again. "Come out! Come out, thou foul bitch!"

No sound answered him. He hurled himself upon the door again.

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"No, eh? Thou wilt not come out! Very well then, pretty Nanni! What? I cannot hear! Is it thou?"

"It is I, Conrad! My father is dying. Wilt thou go and bid the priest come, and my mother and my brother also?"

He rocked with laughter. "The priest? I am the priest! I will wed thee to thy lover. I am thy lover, the gallant Conrad, Baron von Felsenburg. I will bring the oils. I will anoint him, my jewel, upon the eyes and the ears, the nostrils and the mouth, the hands and the feet!"

"Swiftly, oh, go swiftly, Conrad von Felsenburg! The fright has been too strong for him. His eyes are rolling. Go swiftly! I cannot leave him!"

"Indeed," he said, "thou canst not! Would the little goose play the fox?" he asked playfully. "My plump little goose?"

He heard her draw the bolt upon the further side of the door. He tightened his grip upon the door-handle.

"No, no, my sweetheart!" he said pleasantly. "Thou too must possess thy soul in patience!"

"He is dying! Let me go for Father Josef! There is little time!"

"Time enough for the tow-haired bastard later! Sing me a song, Nanni!"

He felt her grip relax from the inner door-handle. Again there was silence in the sick man's room. He sat himself down comfortably against the door, feeling in his pockets for his pipe with his free hand. The door and walls were of such stout timber that if the man or his daughter were speaking, or she moving about, it was impossible to hear.

It would do her no harm to frighten her a little, even if the old man were in a bad way. He struck a match with difficulty and lit up his pipe. The blood dripped heavily from his cheeks on to his grey frieze hunting-jacket. Oh,

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the sly little bitch! She thought she'd send him trotting out of the way, did she?

"Nanni!" he called softly.

There was no reply.

"Sing me a little song, Nanni!"

Then of a sudden, he heard a howl of such desolation that it seemed that a dog and not a human being had uttered it. He flung the door open, and saw, as it appeared, two dead creatures in the room. The girl seemed, of the two, more dead. Her face was white as chalk. Her eyes were like slate. The other, her father who lay dying, and so certainly dying that he might be deemed already dead, seemed, by contrast with his daughter, vehemently alive; for he strove for breath so harshly, so hopelessly. His grizzled hair was limp with sweat. The veins stood upon his face and hands like cords. The girl was aware of no more than that the door was open. She sped out of the room like a hare released from a trap. Father Josef, as it happened, was no great distance away, for old Julia had seen him at the door of his house and bade him hasten. Old Tratzl, she said, would need him in two hours or three, though earlier she had thought he might last into the next day.

But old Tratzl's need had come sooner, and he was dead by the time Father Josef arrived in his surplice and violet stole, carrying the holy oil under a square of fine cloth. The small boy who went with him, ringing a bell to make the way clear for the Host, was at the same time ringing old Tratzl's passing-bell.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

JULIA was very proprietary and punctilious in the laying out of old Tratzl, and the crossing of his hands upon his breast and the laying of the crucifix between them. And she was more than usually vigilant by his body all night long, after the last visitor had sprinkled him with holy water and muttered a *De profundis*. For he had not received the last sacraments, the poor creature, and the air was full of devils, and if you were not looking very sharply into every angle of the room out of the corner of your eye, and if you remitted your prayers for half a second, then woe on the poor lost soul that went out into the darkness so uncomforted.

None the less, despite the very sensible remonstrances of her devoted friend, Erich Zeiler, the widow dipped her hands generously enough into the stocking of silver and gold pieces thrust away at the bottom of the huge chest of grain under the rafters, and ordered for her dead husband as handsome a funeral as Midrans could provide. And as if this were not enough by way of entertainment for the village, not more than a month later, another fairly well-to-do peasant, Jacob Kranz by name, died too, though he was more fortunate in the manner of his dying. In fact, he gave, if anything, a rather too generous notice of his impending decease, for the passing-bell was rung a good hour before he was dead. He opened his eyes and cursed old Steffel, the sexton, soundly, for being so premature. But he was dead an hour later, and old Julia was once

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more the queen of the moment, and an arrogant despot she was at these times. Now Frau Kranz was not going to have her husband buried with any less ceremony than Frau Tratzl, and she gave Father Josef to understand that no expense was to be spared. It was not. Once again the whole village turned out with that enthusiasm which only a funeral excited. There was no question upon these occasions of who had cheated whom of a couple of kilos of rye when it had been arranged that so-and-so should bake so-and-so's stock of bread for the month at the same time as he baked his own. There was no question of priest's men or Hugo's men at such a time. It was only a question of putting on your best clothes and shooting your best at the butts, drinking your fullest at the inn, when the mournful ceremony was over, and old Steffel, the sexton, had slipped off his garments of black and silver trimmings under the lee of the cemetery wall, and the last clod had been flung on to the heap of clods under which the dead creature lay.

The whole village took part in the procession between the dead man's house and the cemetery, which thrust inwards against the woods from a platform of the hill where the fourteen stations of the cross climbed to the Chapel of the Calvary. Tall Toni was there not less than Lorenz Brachmond, everybody but the lord of the Felsenburg, though he happened to be in residence. Indeed, it was hardly to be expected that the Herr Baron should put himself out for a mere Jacob Kranz. In any case the Herr Baron was not much seen in public these days, ever since the Gendarmerie had had to telephone for half a dozen extra gendarmes to escort the Baron's wonder-working guests and their attendants down the valley to Schlamms. Hugo Harpf took his place in the procession. Why should

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he not? Who could forbid him without converting a day of mourning, and high spirits generally, into a day of very ugly possibilities?

Jacob Kranz lacked no sort of respect. The Midrans band had not played with such feeling at any funeral within recent memory. Very noble they looked, in their scarlet coats with green lapels and their high black conical hats jauntily set off by a cock's feather, and their embroidered leather shorts and their broad elaborate belts and their green-and-white woollen leg-casings. They halted outside the gate of the cemetery upon a small platform of bright grass; and their thrilling music and their scarlet coats and the grand cross held by the cross-bearer and the sable splendour of the priest in the vestments of funeral and the number of the mourners filing through into the cemetery — it was enough to console any widow for widowhood. But the widow did not lift her bowed head nor unfold her hands from under her black apron; and the great black ribbons floated from her stiff hat like a horse's plumes in the windy air.

And so she and her children stood about the grave while the grand solemnity proceeded and Father Josef filled all the space between the turned sods and the scudding clouds. And the priest now began the Benedictus and the bearers came close and lowered the coffin into the pit prepared for it. And now he had handed over to the widow the holy-water sprinkler, and she had sprinkled the coffin and flung upon it the first clod, and the dead man's eldest son now held the sprinkler in his hands, when of a sudden a sound was heard at the base of the pit. Louder the sound grew and the widow uttered a cry such as none present had heard before. The assembly recoiled with blanched faces. Father Josef stared with wild eyes. But there was

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no doubt of it. A fist was weakly, and with more strength now, pommelling the coffin-lid from within the coffin. One of the bearers had sprung into the pit with an implement that was lying by, to be used later, when the crowd was gone. The coffin-lid was wrenched free at length. The dead man in his shift raised first his head and then his body



from the waist. Slowly then he turned his head, until the unscaled eyes fell upon the eyes of Hugo Harpf.

"I come, Herr Hugo, I come!" the cold lips said. But the blood was coursing again in the cold lips.

"My man!" the woman shrieked whose womb he had quickened. She threw herself into the pit and took his head into her hands and chafed his temples. "He has come again! The Herr Hugo has called him!"

And now the eyes of Father Josef fell upon the lad,

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the miracle-worker, leaning against a tombstone hard by. Hugo's bared hair in the bright light to-day shone like a fine metal. A smile lay upon the corner of his mouth.

"Get thee gone, Antichrist!" the priest cried. "Bone and blood of Satan! Never pollute God's acre nor God's house again!" His fingers twitched. His eyes rolled red and terrible, tormented, implacable.

"As it pleases you, high-worthy-one!" said Hugo Harpf. He sauntered easily over to the gate of the cemetery, swinging his new green hat in his hand. The mourners that had no dead to mourn for, made way for him. Whether they feared and execrated him now all the more, or thought him to be worshipped now all the more, they made way for him.

"Go quickly, someone!" cried Frau Kranz, at all times a practical woman. "Bring Schnapps!"

The priest stood a few yards away, shaking as if a palsy were upon him. "*Infame Mensch!*" he cried. "Bone and blood of Satan!" And to some it seemed, if not unpriestly, then at least inhuman, that it should be deplored at this moment, or at any time, that a dead man was dead no longer.

"And the Herr Hugo, where is he gone?" breathed the husband of Frau Kranz.

"No matter now!" bade Marta, his wife, sharply. "Come, swallow this!"

CHAPTER TWENTY

IT is probable that even if Hugo's larch-wood had lain on the direct path between the village and the higher pastures, the peasants would have made a detour to avoid it, leaving the Miracle Boy alone there, in undisputed possession of all that green silence. But actually no path led through it, for its further edge toppled over into a steep ravine. Here no one went in the time of Hugo's miracle-working, and no one goes now. Hugo's Wood they call it, the Hugoswald, and he is still its sole denizen. Here, as some had it, he came to hold commerce with God. Here he came, said others, to report to Satan. But in truth he came to this place because, by making it his own, none would seize the hem of his coat to kiss it as he passed by, and none, avoiding his shadow, would finger his rosary furtively and stuff his mouth with prayers. He came here for surcease of thought. How should a peasant lad think at all, how think a way through the charged and thrilling blackness that moaned about him like wires? And himself at once a bird snared in the wires and the snarer that stretched them?

He knew of the desolate vanity that came to him in the village, among his people, and more among those that feared than those who worshipped. Here among the larches was no place for vanity, no place for thought, no place for anything at all but the smell of earth and the light filtered through the thick branches. He threw himself down upon a warm bank and closed his eyes and became earth, like the earth he lay on.

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He did not hear her footfall as she approached him. She always moved lightly, like a loose leaf, even when she performed heavy labours. But he knew it was she, and he knew when she halted, her hands folded under her apron, and her large eyes fixed mournfully upon his shut lids.

"So thou art come," he said softly. It was as if he slept. He did not open his eyes.

"I am come, Herr Hugo," she replied.

"I am happy, little maiden. I have waited for nothing else."

"Thou art gracious, Herr Hugo."

"Hush, hush, Nanni! I am thy lover. I am nothing else."

"I have been a wanton. How can I be thy sweetheart?"

"Thou hast kept thyself for me, thy bridegroom."

"I knew I was none other's. I lied. I laughed and sang for him, and he gave me jewels. But at night I knew. I wept. And in the morning I lied again, even to myself."

"I knew thou wouldst tell truth in the end."

"Thou art truth, Hugo."

"I am neither truth, nor falsehood. I am magic. And for thee I wrought it, and thou art come to me."

"They say, Hugo, they say . . ."

"Let them say, my sweet. They will say till days end."

"I am afraid for thee, I that have no right to rejoice or be afraid."

"Come sit beside me, *dierndl*, come, maiden. So. Put thy head upon my shoulder. Ah, little one, smooth-cheeked little maiden, whose hair is like sweet herbs. Close thine eyes, even as mine are closed. Art thou afraid? And of what afraid, maiden?"

"Of the powers thou hast, *bua*. Comfort me."

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"There is no comfort. It is powers that have me."

"Ah!"

"Hush, hush! One day or the next day, sure was thy coming. To-morrow or the day after, so sure is our dying."

"Thy hand, Hugo, is firm and strong and the hand of a lover. And thou art strong, Hugo. Ah, Hugo, Hugo. . . ."

"Speak, maiden!"

"And thou art strong, and thou gavest thy strength away."

"It was my weakness I gave to them, that were but shadows of thee. For thee is my strength only, but this is less than before. No child sucking the breast is not stronger than I, Nanni. I that am stronger than all men am weaker than all men."

"I will give thee strength, I that did not spend it, despite all the wantoning and the lying, despite the kisses he gave me and I gave him again."

"Dost thou love me, Nanni?"

"Dost thou love me, Hugo?"

"Even the powers are spent in my love for thee, like the grass in a fire. They will not prevail always. They will subdue utterly the flesh they have so weakened. And there shall be no flesh to house them for a thousand and a thousand years. But I shall be thy house always and thou shalt be mine."

"Riddles, Hugo. Thou didst never speak so. I, a peasant maiden. . . ."

"And I a peasant lad. I speak wisdom and I know not whence coming. I perform marvels and I know not how and to what purpose. Excepting a maiden. She was the purpose. I needed none other. Wilt thou kiss me, Nanni?"

"So, Hugo, so!"

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"And again, Nanni! So! Thine eyes are shut still, Nanni, even as mine?"

"Even as thine, Hugo!"

"Disrobe thyself, maiden."

"As thou biddest, beloved."

"Thou art silk. There is no silk thou hast ever worn so smooth as thou. Come to me close, Nanni. I am afraid. I am afraid. Closer, Nanni. Nestle so. Thy heart upon my heart."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I

IT is with the resurrection of Nanni Tratzl's father from the grave where they had laid him two months earlier, unanointed and unconsolated, that the running commentary of exposition and vituperation ceases, with which Conrad von Felsenburg seems to have accompanied the career in miracle of Hugo Harpf. But even by the time of Jacob Kranz's awakening in his coffin, his audience had apparently dwindled to his household staff and immediate dependants. Huber, his head-keeper, had at one time been the repository of all von Felsenburg's furious explanations. But whether he felt that Huber had very inefficiently propagated them, or whether he found it necessary to give himself the semblance of addressing a crowd, any sort of a crowd, he dragged in first the house-keeper, then the women who helped her, then anybody and everybody who dared not say no to him. A state of things in which a von Felsenburg spoke to his household as if it consisted not of swine and curs, but of intelligent human beings, was wholly without precedent. He himself perceived shortly that such behaviour was merely another symptom of his own preposterous condition, for which the peasant lout, and no one else at all, was responsible. He perceived this unpalatable fact upon the very night that followed his learned dissertation on the nature of catalepsy, which was itself a comment on the alleged resurrection of Jacob Kranz. He demonstrated very patiently the self-evident facts of the situation. He even absolved Hugo

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Harpf from any complicity in the matter other than his compliance with the general conclusion that he, and not the nervous system of Jacob Kranz, was at the bottom of it all. He narrated authentic cases of suspended animation, with consequent interment of the patient, and how sometimes, as upon this occasion, the most lamentable of human misfortunes had been avoided by a margin of minutes, and how sometimes, alas, it had not. He went on to discuss the cognate matter of pseudo-catalepsy, both partial and entire. His own friend, their recent visitor from Medenine in Tunisia, was a master of that impressive accomplishment. His colleague from Bengal claimed that he could place himself into such a condition that he might be interred for forty days in a sealed tomb, and under a guard of soldiers, and issue at the end, smiling. It was a pity that, owing to a regrettable misunderstanding, the foreign gentlemen had been forced to cut short their contract. He, von Felsenburg, himself admitted that he could see no other explanation of such a marvel, even granting the Fakir the most astounding powers of pseudo-catalepsy, than that he threw the sealers and the guards of his tomb into a condition of hypnotic trance during which they imagined they took certain measures which, in fact, they did not. It would be merely a matter of average ingenuity to get back into the sealed tomb again half an hour before the moment was due, forty days later, when he was to be unsealed and liberated. It was a pity, said von Felsenburg, that our friend has been forced to leave us prematurely.

It is a pity, thought Martin Huber, that that fat little wench will be waiting for me all this time in the log-hut.

It is a pity, thought Anna, that that chicken will be boiled to rags.

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It is a pity, thought young Ferdl, who helped with the garden, that they'll have eaten everything up and there won't be a crust for me.

And "*Ja! Ja! Herr Baron!*" said they all intelligently; moving heavy jaws in ox-like faces.

But it was not for their satisfaction that the Herr Baron rehearsed his comforting pathology. "You may go," said he abruptly.

"Kiss the hand, Herr Baron!"

And that same evening he saw Anna his housekeeper and Ferdl the garden-boy grovelling on all fours to kiss the place where Hugo Harpf had passed. They were dismissed his service the next day, but their successors were never again invited to his circumstantial dissertations. He did not confide, even to Martin Huber, his explanation of the resurrection of Nanni Tratzl's father, which came two months later, or the several other resurrections that followed (as they believe in Midrans) during the next half-year.

If the resurrections alleged to Hugo Harpf had been confined to the three instances of Jacob Kranz, old Tratzl and the stillborn child of Hans Wappens, it would have been fairly easy to accept the explanation proffered by von Felsenburg of the first event, and to account for the other two on valid psychological grounds which the pure sceptic, assisted by the Baron's general interpretation of the whole history, would have had no difficulty in accepting. These benighted and besotted peasants, such a person might have said, had convinced themselves that a young man, one of their own number, had performed prodigies outside the course of nature. The sceptic would not pause at that moment to examine whether the young man himself was as

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much his own dupe as the community. Something fantastic obviously had happened, or had seemed to happen. From that nucleus the ludicrous legend had developed by natural accretion, even during the young man's lifetime, and the young man had done nothing to discourage it. Why should he? So long as the illusion lasted — and the illusion might persist even after he had shifted in his own flesh from its centre to a point quite outside its circumference — the young man need never do an honest day's work again. In his own home they fattened him like a sacred bull, a beast he permitted himself in a number of respects to resemble. When he went out into the village, he would be given as much wine to swill as a prize pig garbage. If he reduced himself to a state of hiccuping drunkenness, the spectacle would not perturb these gross minds, to whom he appeared as the vessel of divine (or infernal) powers. It was a state as near to the seventh bliss as they were at any time capable of contemplating; and if, like all primitive people, they accepted the professional imbecility of a regular zany as something somehow divine, the sporadic imbecility of a drunken Miracle Boy would not offend them.

In other words the business filled the lad's stomach and tickled his vanity. About the overweening vanity that was developed in the young man there seems no doubt at all, though the fact is never isolated in the consciousness of his disciples (if the word may be so used) and is only to be incidentally inferred. It is true that he made no claims for himself. He never stated that he would raise himself from the dead as he had raised others. It was the others, those who had adored him, so obscurely, so savagely, who knew that at three in the morning, upon the first cock-crow, he too, like Jesus Christ, would step forth from the sepulchre.

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For himself, nothing more can be said, it seems, than that he had such a premonition of his imminent death as befalls many ordinary men. He did not picture death to himself as a radiance in which he would be transfigured. The thought of it irritated him. It seemed unfair. What had he done, after all, that he must leave so early the lads and men with whom he drank in the inn, and the girl he had won back from his exalted enemy? When she gave herself to him in the woods as a priestess offers herself for sacrifice, he, for his part, did not view it so. He was aware of her small smooth body and her eyes and her hair. He was afraid. He bade her hold him closely.

Nothing, therefore, that their crude minds were capable of conceiving, was not possible to Hugo Harpf. And it is to be noticed that his achievements are strictly confined by precisely those limits. Seeing that there was a Miracle Boy to hand upon whom the actual execution of those prodigies might be foisted, which might seem to them especially appropriate or desirable, the myth is generated by the thought. So it is that the old man and the stillborn baby are rescued from purgatory and limbo respectively. The manner of Tratzl's dying, with extreme unction so wickedly withheld from him, must have shocked them profoundly. But what was the use of a Miracle Boy, who has already raised one man out of the pit, at the very moment that earth was thudding down upon him to claim him for all time — what was the use of such a creature if he could not bring back among living men, even though two months have passed since he died, a miserable wretch whose job in purgatory would be so much more protracted and desperate as a result of so unsatisfactory a dying? And if old Tratzl might thus be rescued from several æons of pur-

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gatory, why not extend a similar privilege to Hans Wap-pens's stillborn baby, who, never having been baptized, must, for at least so long, peak and pine in the cold halls of limbo.

Now it would be highly satisfactory to accept the fore-going interpretation of this particular aspect of Hugo's history if no other dead than these had been, as they think, resurrected. But it so happens that these two resurrections are separated by a third, and in this instance the resur-



rected person lacks neither baptism nor extreme unction, and this same "myth," none the less, is generated. For the following tale is recounted concerning Mitsel Pech, a gentle little girl twelve years old; that she slipped under one of Anton Wild's cart-horses, so that a wheel of the cart passed over her ribs; that the life was crushed out of her, though she lingered on in great pain for some hours; that she died shriven of her few pitiful little sins and with all the consolations of the last rites administered; that while she lay dead on her bed, Hugo Harpf came by and bade life enter her again; and that she lived, but not happily, until

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that most grisly and most unhallowed moment when she, and Jacob Kranz, and old Tratzl, and Hans Wappens's child that had been stillborn, and Hiasl the zany, and one or two others, all fell upon death simultaneously.

It might have been said, and it was said by his enemies, that to bring into life again a small creature for whom life and pain must be identical terms, was no kindness. It was said not only by Hugo Harpf's friends, but by the child herself and by her parents. It was said also, but more furtively, by the distracted parents of a boy, Gastl Tambosi, who died of sickness, and lived again, and walked the streets of the village more substantially than any of the other returners. And not even Hugo's men could understand what the point might be in the resurrecting of Hiasl the zany, who was a nuisance to himself and to his folk and to the whole village, and, unluckily for himself, was just not zany enough to be unaware of the useless shambling dithering lout he was.

There is, therefore, no principle of fine sentiment or any sort of benevolence upon which these dead were brought to life again, either in outrageous fact or in the subconscious volition of the Midransers. More than the lesser miracles attributed to him, the resurrections seemed to be dictated by caprice rather than upon any scheme intelligible or sympathetic to ordinary minds. But the inscrutability of it in no way lessened the prestige of the Miracle Boy, either among those who thought him God or those who thought him Devil; nor even among those who were the relatives of the resurrected ones, the wretched victims of their incalculable moods. Hugo Harpf filled the whole valley, and his hair was all its morning and his whisper was louder than the winter gales in the forests.

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2

Old Tratzl had no great journey to make between his grave and his home that night when Hugo bade him come. There were one or two late revellers on the road under the cemetery, and they shrieked with laughter when they saw him approach in the fine shirt he had put aside to be buried in, the one thing he had never tried to economize over. They poked their fingers at him and shrieked again. They had never known their drink produce so comical and so convincing an illusion. But in any case everything in the village was so topsy-turvy, there was so much talk of miracle, nothing was so rarely the thing it seemed, that, hally-ha-oo, perhaps it *was* old Tratzl. Why not? So yodelling and hallooing, and breaking every now and again into a dirty chorus, they staggered on. Old Tratzl was annoyed and offended. That was no way for a man to be treated after lying for two months in the cold grave. Herr Hugo, who had arranged it all, should have seen to it that these fellows didn't try and spoil it at the very outset.

But his wife, anyhow, would not belch the fumes of wine into his face and bawl at him and poke her fingers into his chest. It was chilly. He gathered his shirt-tails about him and hoped he wasn't going to meet anyone else on the way home.

The sight that met his eyes as he peered in through the living-room window, through a trellising of carnation and geranium, made him think twice about entering at all. He had a good mind to go back again to the cemetery under the Kalvarienberg and lie down in his grave again and wrap his shirt round him and die a second time.

He saw the table spread with an array of so many and

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such costly foods that, even as he stood gaping in at the window, his head started reeling with regiments of figures. Duck and roast chicken, sucking-pig and hare, cream and fruit and cherries in brandy — and wine and Schnapps and more wine and a great tureen of bacon-dumplings and loaves made out of pure white flour and veal fillets and roast chicken . . . no, the same roast chicken it was. It was scandalous, scandalous! The heinous extravagance of the feast spread before them prevented him for two blind minutes from seeing who the feasters were. The feast must have begun several hours ago, he perceived. Several of the roasts were now mere anatomies. The table itself, the floor under and all round it, were strewn with lumps of food, discarded with the utmost cynicism and prodigality. They would have sufficed the whole family for a fortnight, in the régime that preceded his death. It only dawned on him slowly that Mimi, his wife, was not sitting upon her own chair, but upon the knees of one, Erich Zeiler, a disreputable wood-thief and poacher. He had himself not frowned at that gentleman's furtive appearances at his back door with a haunch of illegal chamois or a goose which he was ready to sell at a ludicrously cheap price. And this had been the real meaning of their conferences — this swilling of good wine, this gorging of fine food, and all, all, at *his* expense!

He could hardly recognize the creature for his own wife, though he had only left her two months ago. He remembered her as lean and silent. She was now plump as a girl and her cheeks were rosy. She had her left arm about the poacher's neck, and they were both screaming with laughter. But the indignation he felt as he pushed the door open and entered the room was still the result more of his wife's extravagance than her infidelity.

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"What's this? What's all this?" he twittered angrily. "Thou thinkest, Mimi, I am made of gold, yes?"

Frau Tratzl's mouth was petrified in the course of a large-lipped kiss that it was manufacturing.

"Jesus, Son of God!" she cried.

"No! No!" Old Tratzl stamped his naked foot impatiently. "Herr Hugo it was! What is this blackguard doing in my house?"

Frau Tratzl uttered a series of short sharp cries. Erich Zeiler was dirty-white, like an old sheet. But he was a brave and resourceful man, as he needed to be in the successful prosecution of his business. It occurred to him, as it had occurred to the belated revellers under the cemetery, that he and his bride-elect were more drunk than they had realized. He seemed to remember other occasions when he had been confronted with nightmares not less convincing.

"Hush, little sow!" he insisted. "Thou'rt drunk! I'm drunk!"

Old Tratzl was beside himself with wrath. "And on *my* wine and *my* Schnapps! You dirty pair of adulterers! Get out!" he gibbered, shaking his skinny fist towards the powerful frame of the poacher. "Get out! If I see thee cross the threshold of my house again, I'll tell the Herr Baron who it was shot that chamois thou hadst to leave under the Martinsgipfel, because thou hadst sprained thy ankle and it was morning and thou couldst not get it down in time. And as if it were not enough to rob the rich thou must rob the poor too! A poor man who does not know where to turn to find the next pair of boots for his children!

"And thou, bitch!" he cried, turning to his widow. "Get me some clothes at once, I bid thee. What? Thou canst not hear me?"

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She tried wildly to follow Zeiler as he crept towards the door. Zeiler put his finger on his lips and shook his head, as if he were just going to get some help from the village and would be back at once. But he did not return that night. He was never seen anywhere in the vicinity of old Tratzl's house while the old man maintained the sepulchral and querulous second existence into which Hugo Harpf had called him.

3

It was the same with old Tratzl as with all the returners, whether they had been absent for hours only, or days. Somehow they were not wanted; even so soon they had become superfluous. Nor could they themselves remain unconscious of this. That was one reason for their dreadful irritability. They twittered and moaned and whined and puled; even Jacob Kranz, who had been a strong man, and little Gastl Tambosi, who had fancied himself hardly less strong and manly. And this sensation of their superfluousness entrenched them all the more firmly in their colossal, their towering, vanity. They sought out Hugo Harpf, though they did not love him; or bade him come to them, when they were too frail to walk, and he came. They did not see why, being privileged ones who had come back from the grave into life again, they too should not be miracle-workers. But so far from possessing supra-normal powers, they could not eat or drink or love or breathe with even normal dignity. Only in one respect did they find themselves capable of making Hugos out of themselves. They could inflate their feeble bosoms with something of his vanity. So that they strutted like peacocks and gobbled

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angrily like turkeys; though they made so feeble a show both of strutting and gobbling that they scarcely imposed themselves either upon the eye or the ear. There was not one of the returners whose pre-mortal virtues were not attenuated into almost nothing at all, and whose weaknesses and vices, so far as they had the strength to exercise them, were not exacerbated. Old Tratzl had been a gallant prodigal in the old days compared with the grinding miser he was now. The roses faded swiftly enough from his wife's cheeks and the plumpness fell from her hips. His boy, Seppl, fortunately, spent most of his time among his friends, the younger Harpfs, or he might have fallen into a decline. As for Nanni, she had little interest these days in food or drink, or kerchiefs for her hair or shawls for her shoulder. She was a nun whose Christ had flesh, and with him she performed the joint sacraments of flesh and spirit.

The child of the mule-faced Hans Wappens which had been born dead and made living, contrived to crowd into the half-year of its existence more worry than the average Midrans family inflicted upon their parents during the whole career from birth to the birth of their own first children. The mule-face lost something of its stock-like stupidity, so harassed was it by the miserable infant. The small girl, Mitsel Pech, who had been crushed under Anton Wild's cart, dithered like a bat all day long, and was not content unless Sister Teresa sent over half-a-dozen of her little girls to sit with her all through the morning, while she rehearsed to them her glory, how she had been dead and Herr Hugo had brought her to life again. She shrieked thinly at night, and cried for the moon and stars, though she was no idiot, and knew that they

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could not be given her. But she felt that it was not right that they could not. Had she not been herself further away than the moon or any star?

In the household of Jacob Kranz there had never been an angry word. Now that he had been raised from the dead, nothing was ever good enough for him. The soup was all fat or was not fat enough and there was mud in the wine and when the bread was not full of gravel it was full of cockroaches. And though it could not be said of Frau Kranz, as it could of Frau Tratzl, that she had already taken to herself a consoler — for indeed, she had scarcely had the time — the wretched woman could not help admitting to herself that she had rather she had not been married even once, rather than that she should undergo a second period of marriage, and one so miserable.

As for poor Hiasl, the zany, he needed no one to tell him that if he had been a nuisance to everybody before he had died, now that he was alive again, he was a calamity. But even he could not refrain from proclaiming what especial glory was his, that out of all the millions upon millions who had been dead like himself, Herr Hugo should have chosen him, Hiasl, the poor Trottel, to be a returner, like the worthy Jacob Kranz and Herr Tratzl, who had so much money and so many cows.

None the less, howsoever vain they were of their returning, howsoever elated, in their gruesome manner, by the compliment that Hugo Harpf had paid them, they did not love the Miracle Boy. No, they did not love him. And it is said that Jacob Kranz, who had been dead for the shortest time and had therefore the least reason to behave so badly, stirred up his companions against their master, bidding them, so many as could manage it, join him among the pines and there intercept Hugo on his return from the

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larch-wood. And this certain of them did, filling themselves up with as much wine as their stomachs could hold; and they fell upon him as he passed down towards the edge of the wood. He was deep in thought, and not even the cawing of his raven could distract him from it. And while one of them threw his coat over the bird, that had flown towards him with gaping beak, the others belaboured Hugo with their fists. But he did not lift his head. It was as if the leaves of a beech-tree were fluttering about his shoulders. Sombrely and slowly he continued towards the clear ground. But the others halted in the twilight of the wood, gibbering and shaking their fists, the tears streaming down their ashen faces.

There was no use for them. What right had they in the bright world? What did they in this place? They sat down upon the mossy earth, their heads upon their bosoms, and mourned.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I

THERE were other reasons why Conrad von Felsenburg suspended his explanations of Hugo Harpf's miracles than the lack of an audience. (Martin Huber was always ready to oblige, but he could hardly be called an audience; moreover, the Baron had his suspicions that Huber himself was not untainted by the obstreperous heresy.) In the first place, he seems to have been only sporadically in residence at the Felsenburg during the last few months of Hugo's life. There were a good many dropped threads to pick up again now that the beleaguered armies did not any longer block the way to Paris or Naples or Moscow, although, to be sure, he seems to have had his own ways of retaining throughout the whole war-time more threads than most people, despite all the intervening complexities of trenches and politics.

However, he kept on reappearing unexpectedly in Midrans at odd times, not because he seemed to have much business there, but because a certain sickness was in his bones, and he could not help returning to the place; for no man can keep away from the thing he greatly loves or greatly hates. Or few men, at least, and von Felsenburg was not one of these. He had not schooled himself to the subordination of any of his passions. He had subtilized them, aggravated them, they were his creed and poetry. And he had come to hate Hugo Harpf more than he had

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ever hated or loved anything in all his life before. The peasant youth had flouted his intelligence and frustrated his learning, and there were many distinguished people who held with von Felsenburg himself that both these were formidable. He had degraded the antique castle of Felsenburg till it loomed, in the eyes of the serfs who had for centuries trembled under its shadow, no higher than a cowshed. He had stolen, he, the peasant lout, had stolen from the lord of the Floriansthal the juicy plum that in the next wind would have tumbled into his mouth. The girl had withstood him, von Felsenburg. She had held him at arm's length, teased him, mocked him, prattled sweetly of the day when she should be *châtelaine* of the castle. The thought of how she had escaped him tormented him like salt in a wound. His power over women was his most sensitive and particular vanity. He rehearsed the women he had known — the Englishwomen in their great houses, the Sicilian girls under the eyes of their lovers, the practised and wary ladies from Copenhagen. All these his skill had compassed and conquered. A peasant maiden from his native valley had, on the other hand, conquered him. It was no secret that, in the larch-wood over against the ravine, reserved to them by the whole village to be their marriage-bed, the mountebank clipped her in his sweaty arms.

All his life long he had carefully cultivated all his passions. They had been his servants. One passion was his master now. It was this passion which streamed in cold rays from his eyes one day, when, as he rode up the valley from Schlamms towards his house, a young man with a raven upon his shoulder and a lad beside him stepped into the road from the wood that bordered it. The young man was bigly made but slack, his face was rather pasty, his

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hands pale and soft. He had stony blue eyes, like the blue shadow of a cloud upon snow. He held his hat rolled up in his hand to let the wind go into his yellow hair.

An instinct seized von Felsenburg to ride the young man down, here, at once, to crack his skull under the hooves of his horse, to trample his brains and his hair into the mud of the cart-ruts. He controlled it; even though the young man, perceiving who the horseman was and the manner in which the horseman stared down at him, smiled back faintly, candidly, impertinently. Von Felsenburg put the spurs into his horse, and galloped away.

It was the neck of the young man that taunted him, the open space of the neck above the open grey homespun shirt. More than the eyes and the sickening hair, the neck taunted him. He bit his teeth into his tongue to prevent himself from screaming out the thought, or the picture rather, that presented itself to him. He was in better trim that night than usual, in the Felsenburg. Stafi, his new housekeeper, heard him roar with laughter over his dinner. It seemed uncanny to her, for he was alone. She crossed herself and pattered out two or three prayers. That sound boded no good, she thought, and shook her head.

The lad who had been with Hugo was his brother, Ludl. Apart from Nanni and, of all people, Toni the Trottel, it was young Ludl he chose for company, when he wanted to get away from himself and the things that were about him. His two elder brothers had now both come back from the War. Alois, who had been a prisoner, was a wood-cutter again in the preserves towards Schlamms which had belonged to the Crown once and now belonged to the Republic. They were on their way to spend the night with Alois when the Herr Baron passed them. Alois had sent

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word of a lordly meal that awaited them; he had managed to buy a superb stag cheap, for no more, in fact, than the price of a cartridge. Franzl, the eldest brother, had come back with clear ideas as to his importance in the household. It had taken him not more than a day or two to weigh up the sort of man his father had become, under the stress of his wife's loss and the drink he soused himself in to console himself for it. The old man had been no abstainer before. Now, until Franzl returned, the flask was never away from his lips. Franzl was quite convinced he was not going to have his patrimony converted into a vat of wine with a leak in it. He had brought back ambitious ideas of improving the breed of the Floriansthal cattle, and intended shortly to wed a maiden by whom to breed a fresh stock of the Harpf cattle. His father still occupied the great double bed in the main bedroom. The second night after his arrival Franzl transferred the old man by the scruff of his neck, complaining and dribbling, to a heap of sacks and straw under a gable. As for Hugo, his brother, he had no objection to Hugo walking on water or making rose-bushes bloom miraculously, so long as he played no tricks with the milk and helped clean out the cowshed when he was asked to.

Lüdl was a frank little boy. There was no nonsense about him. He was aware of the Baron's hatred for Hugo, as the whole village was. It was only Hugo himself who seemed completely uninterested in the fact, excepting that it added a further sweet little tickle to his vanity. He had recovered his maiden from the Herr Baron. Henceforth the Herr Baron had no concern for him. Conrad von Felsenburg, too, must have divined the peasant lad's indifference. It cannot have made him any the more amiably disposed towards him.

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"Didst thou see?" stormed Ludl. "Didst thou see how he glared at thee?"

"I saw," said Hugo easily. "What then?"

"Would I could tear out his eyes like a pig's bladder!" he cried vehemently. The ancestral Harpf hatred for the von Felsenburgs had been inherited more bountifully by Ludl than by Hugo. "His eyes," he repeated, "didst thou not see his eyes?"

"How should I not see?" said Hugo.

"He means harm to thee, Hugo! Oh, Hugo, why dost thou not ——"

The lad's manner changed suddenly. His fury left him. He put his arm through his brother's and they walked on a few yards.

"Hugo!" he wheedled.

"But what?"

"It were so easy for thee, Hugo! Listen! Thou wilt not be angry, Hugo? Thou art always angry these days!"

"Not with thee, Ludl! I cannot help it. The words come from my throat. The people are all so foolish!"

"It were so easy, Hugo! Everybody knows how he hates thee! But if thou desirest it, no one would know. Thou couldst do it now, even this moment, thou standing here and he riding up towards the Felsenburg. I hate him! I hate him! He would do thee harm! Hugo, it were so easy for thee! Slay him!"

"No, I shall not be angry with thee, Ludl! No, I shall not! But I have said to thee before, is it not true, that for me the possible things are the things I may not do. Thou art young. How shalt thou understand? For me the impossible things only. I may not put to death. Who can not? I may only awaken from death. Who else can? I ask thee that, Ludl, ha? Who else can?"

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"Ja, Hugo!" said Ludl meekly. "I understand!" He was very nearly blubbing. "How many hours is it, thinkest thou, Hugo, to the hut of Alois?"

2

To murder the peasant lout with his own hands seemed to a hedonist like von Felsenburg the height of folly. He admitted to himself that it would be pure casuistry to try and persuade himself that he would not honour Hugo Harpf with so high a compliment. A von Felsenburg who was content to fornicate with a peasant maiden could not deem himself too exalted to murder her lover. No, he quite sensibly saw that the consequences of a murder which could be traced to him might be unpleasant, more so now than in the right-thinking times that preceded the War and the Revolution. It seemed to him that Toni the Trottel was so perfect an instrument for his design that he was almost in danger of believing in an elderly gentleman called God-the-Father so anxious to wipe out the insult placed upon himself and his son in this remote Austrian valley, that he proffered a whole galaxy of zanies for the purpose, with a special recommendation of the suitability of bony Toni, Tall Toni the Trottel.

Of a sudden he remembered what season of the year this was and which of the high festivals was approaching. His grip tightened upon the two sides of the long refectory-table, at the head of which he sat making a hearty dinner (for his canter had given him an appetite). He threw his head back and laughed uproariously.

The fortunate conjunction of person and season! Several weeks ahead was Good Friday. Upon that day there should be a Calvary in Austria and another Christ

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crucified. The other was a carpenter and this one a house-painter, two Miracle Boys, birds of a feather. He dabbed his eyes with his table-napkin and attacked the roast lamb with increased zest. A not inappropriate dish, he said to himself pleasantly.

3

There was no face more blissful in Midrans these days than Toni's. There was, in fact, no other blissful face at all. There was an air of strain about the village. The men still gathered in the two great rooms of the White Lamb and in the garden under the orchard, for there was nowhere else where they might gather. It was known that Frau Prandl and her husband were definitely of Hugo's party. In the Herrenzimmer, Anton Wild was his most potent, but quite silent, partisan. The no less silent Heinz Abenthum occupied the same position in the Bauernstube. But Hugo Harpf was not discussed in the White Lamb, and not merely because he might saunter in any moment. To himself and to all Midrans the White Lamb was a refuge from the working of miracles.

But not from the thought of them. And though the Midransers were surly men, they had been wont in the past to keep silence because it was their habit, and not because it were most unwise if they did not. If it occurred to them to speak, they spoke, whatsoever veil of secrecy or shame might thus be brutally torn aside. In the White Lamb more than elsewhere the sense of constraint was palpable. But men did not speak openly anywhere at all, at least to members of the opposing faction. Men breathed heavily everywhere. The air was thick with foreboding. Only the small boys in the schoolhouse profited by it.

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Little Adolf Amrain, the schoolmaster, could not keep his mind on the subject in hand for five minutes together.

But Tall Toni was happier than any of the small boys. And that is not merely because these same small boys had long ceased to persecute him. He was the friend elect of Hugo Harpf, and they would as soon have thrown stones at Hugo as at him. Might not Herr Hugo, like Elisha, send bears to devour them?

Toni was proud indeed to be Hugo's friend. Of all the lads or men in the village it was with Toni that Hugo would choose to go walking in the stream-side meadows and to send stones skimming over the pool under Wildhauer's mill. Toni had been first in all Midrans to perceive that a saint was visible and tangible in their own place, like Florian or George. With him Hugo rehearsed idly the miracles of the earlier miracle boys and miracle men, how Philip also had brought dead men to life again, bidding the three pagans arise who had died in the breath of the Scythian dragon; and of the lesser miracles of Eusebius and the boat that hastened across the river when he but breathed towards it; and of the lamb which Clement touched with his ring and forthwith a fountain started, that became a river; and of the miracles of Agnes and Martin and Elisabeth.

For all Toni's great shanks and his trailing coat with the sleeves that did not cover the elbow and the battered old velours with a magy cock's-feather stuck in the ribbon, he was a sweeter and simpler creature than any child. With him Hugo always felt at ease; the malady of his bones was abated, the strange irritability each particle of his skin was sensitive to. Whenever he knew that Nanni might not join him during that day, there was no one he sought out so readily as Toni. They plucked flowers and

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threw stones and told tales. And he gave Toni snuff and Toni, taking it, thought himself a grave and important citizen like Johann Wildhauer or Wilhelm Felsheim; and sneezed, and thought it so funny that he threw himself on his back among the flowers and kicked his legs in the air like a colt.

But Toni was not merely proud. He was happy. Herr Hugo had fulfilled the word he had said to him that night when he had first announced he would work miracles. He had cast out Toni's devils. There was no place anywhere in the woods or the desert rocks where Toni could not now go scatheless. Once he had fled into the fearful woods to escape the gibes and the stones of the children, but the devils had come upon him, the devils that he carried within himself and in the air about him, hovering. Now again he went into the woods, but not to escape from gibes and in no fear of devils. He spent long nights there, to savour the peace and the odours and the loveliness of it all. And the loveliness was Hugo. There was no living creature in Midrans, not even Nanni Tratzl, who more loved Hugo Harpf.

As John loved Jesus Christ.

No, no, murmured the wise and the high-well-born Baron, as Judas loved Jesus Christ.

Judas? Judas? The voice of the zany was faint with fear.

Hush, my son, even so! None loved Jesus Christ like Judas that slew him. It was in this wise . . .

There is no record of the Herr Baron being seen in friendly conversation with Toni. Von Felsenburg avoided

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that not merely because it is prejudicial in the eyes of his peasants that a Herr Baron should keep company with a zany, but because it is indiscreet to be seen about with the appointed agent of a murder you are contemplating. None the less, and not quite irrelevantly, during those weeks that preceded the Good Friday upon which Hugo Harpf was strangled, there is reason to believe that the unhappy gentleman was afflicted with insomnia. He was more considerate of his household lately than he had been for a long time, and in letting himself out of the Schloss at night, he took considerable pains not to awaken his poor hard-worked servants. So far as the new housekeeper, Stafi, could determine — but she was never certain whether it was not after all only her fancy — having left the house he made his way round under the wall and disappeared along the ridge which connected the Felsenburg rock with the main mountain-side from which some titan calamity of old time had dislodged it. Certainly no late drinker or early riser ever met him descending into the village or into the valley side on the further side of the Schloss.

The period during which the unhappy Herr Baron suffered — or might have suffered — from insomnia, was the period during which a misery that seemed to have departed for ever from the eyes of Tall Toni settled in them again slowly. It was not that the fear of devils had come back again. Herr Hugo had exorcized them utterly. There were no devils. There was nowhere among the woods or the waste stony places where Toni might not go. There was no accounting for this misery that settled again in his eyes. Not even his secret fairing, Nanni's discarded ring, Hugo's ring, was a charm to exorcize it. But who bothers, anyhow, about a zany's moods? Of course, Herr Hugo did.

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More and more irascible with everybody else, excepting his sweetheart and the young brother he loved dearly, with Toni Hugo was always gentle as a child. And when Herr Hugo seized him by the shoulders one day and shook him and bade him say what sorrow was upon him, Toni did nothing but throw himself upon the ground and howl like a baby and stuff his mouth with grass. All day long he hiccuped out his sobs. What, after all, is there to be done with a Trottell?

They were not devils that Toni met these nights in the woods. Very much not devils. It was the Holy Ghost he met, but not in the shape in which it was familiar to him, a dove with outstretched wings, such as was suspended from a chain in the Bauernstube somewhat in the manner of a lamp-shade, or such as sometimes was let down from a hole in the roof of the Florianskirche. It had taken to itself the shape of a tall and a dark man, with a nose slightly twisted, a man whom Toni had always thought to be, not in gentleness perhaps, but in power, at no great remove from the saints and the angels, even; but concerning whom he had never thought he was so illustrious as this, that the Holy Ghost should come down and sit upon him in cloven tongues, like as of fire.

Von Felsenburg must have realized from the moment when the conception first presented itself to him that if Toni dragged in his name, which was not unlikely, the ravings of a homicidal idiot could not be used as evidence against him. The incoherent references to the cloven tongues, like as of fire, that the zany kept on harking back to, made the question of any complicity on the part of the Herr Baron all the more preposterous; from a legal point of view, at least. What the peasants thought, even at the

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Gendarmerie and the Gemeinde office, was another matter. What they think still is the same matter, and Conrad von Felsenburg does not seem anxious to return to the home of his fathers to hear the matter discussed.

It is not pleasant to conclude that a human being, and an aristocrat, could act so basely; but it seems impossible to doubt that von Felsenburg did indeed practise some ignoble twopenny trick upon the poor zany, and did indeed crown his head with tongues of that flame by which forlorn rescued maidens warm their hands in melodrama and by which green devils in pantomime seek to terrify the large-thighed hero.

The Baron does not seem to have approached Toni immediately with these august pretensions, though the prospect of his imminent apotheosis cannot but have given him a more desperate enjoyment than he had known for years. He went about with something like a snigger on his face these days, even though his nights were so troubled with insomnia. Baron Conrad von Felsenburg in the Rôle of the Holy Ghost. Positively his Only Appearance in this Valley. He leaned back in his swivel-chair and tittered noiselessly.

It was not in that capacity, however, that he first invaded the tranced slumbers of Toni pillowed upon a mossy hump among the moonlit pines. He touched the sleeping zany on the brow gently. The uncouth creature woke with a start. What? Had one of *them* come back again to torment him? Surely, it could be none other! His teeth chattered. And to choose the guise of the Herr Baron, the remote and proud one, the lord of Florian's valley . . .

"Hush! Hush!" said the Herr Baron. "All is well! Have no fear, my son!"

"Is it . . . is it the high-well-born-one? Oh, Herr

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Baron, I meant no harm here! I have no gun. I am only poor Toni the Trottel. I do not seek . . .”

“I was out walking, Toni, and I saw thee lying here. No more than that. The pine-needles make a fine dry bed. Dost thou sleep well here? For all the eider-downs and the soft pillows I cannot sleep a wink these nights. I, too, came out because it is quiet in the woods and no man enters them. Sleep, Toni, why should I mean thee harm?”

“It is indeed the Herr Baron? Flesh and blood! *Gelobt Sei Jesus!*”

“Thou hast always been a brave lad, braver than others I can tell of. Martin Huber has spoken to me often concerning thee. Hush! Sleep again!”

“It is so . . . it is so gracious of the Herr Baron . . . Poor Toni, his head is like grass. It is shaking and waving. I, I mean, I say poor Toni when I mean I. They like me to speak so. The high-well-born-one understands? *I am Toni and I say Toni . . .*”

“Do not perturb thyself. Thou art better than many who would treat thee so, bidding thee say poor Toni when thou meanst thou.”

“It is kind of the most-high-well-born-one to speak so to a poor Trottel. Say! Say! Are you indeed not one of them!” He crossed himself frantically and shouted out a Paternoster so loudly that some sleeping bird awoke in the trees and flapped away heavily across a moonlit clearing.

The Baron sat down gently beside the zany and felt in his pockets. He brought out a lump of barley-sugar as if he were dealing with a small child. The zany’s eyes glistened.

“We will share this,” said the Baron, dividing the lump into halves. “It is good, yes? Whenever I cannot sleep, it

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soothes me. The lady my mother always brought me some when I was fretful."

"Peace be on her soul!" muttered Toni.

"Art thou content now? There are no evil ones that carry *Zuckerl* in their pockets, how?"

"Most gracious, most gracious!" But the barley-sugar muffled his words. "Um!" he said appreciatively, and sucked hard. In the contentment induced by the process, it occurred to him that he need not be unduly embarrassed or elated that the Herr Baron should sit beside him and suck sweets, when a greater than the Herr Baron, no less a person than Herr Hugo, chose him out from all Midrans to be his companion. He reached for his hat and put it on at a slightly rakish angle. He wondered what Fritz and Anderl would say if they could see him now. And Hiasl too, even if he had died and been raised from the dead. After all it was no slight thing to sit on the same hummock with a living high-well-born-one.

It was precisely concerning these that the Herr Baron began to talk now. He had for some time desired to have a few words with the excellent Toni, but no opportunity had presented itself. The fact was, he had been going into a certain matter lately, a matter which intimately concerned Toni. He liked the families of Midrans to live together happy and respectable. And, yes, could Toni guess? No, Toni could never guess. He had a suspicion — could Toni guess now? Toni could not guess. He had a suspicion who Toni's father was. A worthy gentleman, by no means a ragamuffin. It was only a suspicion, mark you. It would take a lot of confirming. Toni must possess his soul in patience. If the man himself got wind of it he'd find means of forestalling the evidence when it was presented to him. It hurt the Herr Baron to see sons separated from the

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fathers who should be keeping them in the lap of luxury. Some time after Easter he was going to bring in a legal gentleman from Innsbruck who would clinch the matter. For the present it must be slow work.

But the trouble was that Fritz and Anderl and the others would also think they had a right to fathers, perhaps even the same one. It might be true that the same one was responsible for one or two other unclaimed orphans. But if Toni would only keep patience, there was no reason why he should not get the father all to himself. He, personally, the Herr Baron, would do everything in his power. He had always heard that Toni was a steady, God-loving, trustworthy fellow. But it was understood that Toni must not say a single word to a soul in Midrans, of the good thing that was brewing for him. No one must know that he had met the Herr Baron in the woods and might meet him again several times before the matter was concluded. Best keep dark about the whole thing. Thou swearest, Toni, yes? But Toni could hardly breathe for excitement. Swear? He fell on his knees and grovelled and kissed the Herr Baron's hand and invoked Mary and her Son and St. Florian and the Herr Hugo and St. Joseph, and seized the Herr Baron's hand again and left the mark of his large wet lips like the track of a snail.

That was the manner, as I picture it, in which the temptation of this later Anthony began. Very delicately the Baron involved the name of the Miracle Boy in these midnight colloquies, for he felt that even with Toni he must tread carefully. Not even Toni could believe, without careful handling, that the sentiments of the Herr Baron regarding Hugo Harpf had been very friendly. Though von Felsenburg's references to Hugo became

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more persistent and circumstantial, Toni still held off, awkward and a little puzzled. But the moment in which Toni's unease was swept away like a twig by a torrent came soon and suddenly. The Herr Baron found himself listening devoutly to a fervent recapitulation of all Hugo's prodigies. The zany's eyes glowed, his bosom heaved with adoration.

For the time being, the matter of Toni's paternity hung fire. Certain documents were not yet forthcoming, which the Baron had ordered to be sought out in the registrar's archives in Innsbruck. If these should not have arrived before Easter they would beyond doubt arrive shortly after.

So that now Hugo Harpf occupied the whole of their conversations, and the question naturally arose between them as to how the Miracle Boy must be most truly thought of. Von Felsenburg now felt it safe to refer specifically to certain calumniators in the village, how they had murmured that he, the Herr Baron, had a hatred for this lad who healed the sick and cast out devils and bade the dead arise. And there may truly have been a time when he was ignorant and mistrustful, but the truth had come to him: how he would not say now, in how awful a revelation. He might tell of that later.

But under what aspect should he most truly be thought of, who so certainly was big with God? Was he a saint merely, or a younger son of God, the brother of Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ had been a carpenter and said he would come again. And his own people knew him not and stoned him and crucified him. What then might be thought of Hugo Harpf that was a painter of holy images? And there were some that would stone him and crucify him, even as Jesus Christ on Golgotha. And there had been the

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greatest of wars foretold by the wise men and at what other time might Jesus Christ come again than now? And who shall say that Hugo Harpf is any other than he? Or who shall say that he is not?

Who shall say, Toni, who shall say?

But you are wise, O high-well-born-one, and I am a poor zany. I can say nothing. Only that a great love is in my heart for him. As it was said of John . . .

John? No, not so, Toni. There was one among the twelve who loved him more dearly. A hundredfold more than the rest, who were fearful of their good names; but this one made it execrable because he so loved him.

Who this one was?

Judas, he was, that so loved Jesus Christ.

Judas? Judas? The voice of the zany was faint with fear.

Hush, my son, even so! None loved Jesus Christ like Judas that slew him. It was in this wise . . .

For thou knowest how Jesus Christ, even as Hugo Harpf, bade the dead rise. But if himself, being dead, he could not raise, how should it be known he was the Christ, Son of God?

And the Holy Ghost went forth from one to the other of them that loved him, beseeching them to betray Jesus Christ that he might so be slain. And being dead, rise from the tomb again, and be seen among men, saying All Hail to his disciples that met him, that came to Galilee and held him by the feet and worshipped him.

And Peter and Paul and James, and this one and the other, said Nay, we will not slay him so to be execrated of all men. And the Holy Ghost went disconsolate among them all, coming at length to Judas, and said, Wilt thou slay him so that he may rise again? And Judas wept

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sorely, and tore his hair, and said Yea, I will slay him, and be execrated of all men, that so he may rise again.

And he rose. And all men saw him.

And if thou slay not Hugo, who then shall slay him? For the Holy Ghost is upon my head in cloven tongues, like as of fire. Behold, my son, the glory and the terror! For thou art the chosen one!

And if thou do not slay him, being even as Judas, being he that loves him most, how shall it be known that he is not less than Jesus Christ? Being Jesus Christ himself? How else shall he arise upon the morning of the third day in a great splendour, and bid thee to his right hand?

Wilt thou slay Hugo, upon the day of the dying of Jesus Christ? Wilt thou slay him, Toni?

Mother! Mary Mother! The cloven tongues upon his head, like as of fire!

Woe! Woe! I shall slay him, as thou biddest. Poor Toni shall slay him, chosen out of all the world!

With my hand, so, that he may rise again!

Our Father, which art in Heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Is this the dawning-time? But I see blood only, and darkness.

And all day long Tall Toni lay face downward under the pines, his mouth stuffed with moss and pine-needles, and did not bend his head or move a limb. Only his raw fingertips stirred like the wings of a hurt moth.

5

The Herr Baron stood at his study window, and looked down upon the village and the three cones which aligned its terraces, the cones which supported the Florianskirche, the priest's house and the Chapel of the Calvary. Beyond

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the furthest of these, a lighter patch of woodland stood out among the dark pines. It was the larch-wood where Hugo Harpf lay or sauntered in the late afternoons. The peasants already spoke of it as the Hugoswald. Beyond the Herr Baron's vision the larch-wood tumbled over into a ravine in a thin spilth of birches.

He ticked the days off complacently. Passions-Sonntag had gone by, called also Black Sunday, because on this day the holy pictures and the crucifixes in the church are draped with black. The Friday that followed was the day of Mary's Seven Sorrows. And now came Palm Sunday, called also Green Sunday, because of the bright grass, and Blue Easter, because of the bright sky. Indulgently he saw the procession of palms pass below him through the streets of the village. How each small boy had striven to outdo his fellow in the length of the palm he carried! How proud his sister was of the fine silk ribbons and the cakes and the scapulars and the apples she had tied round it!

And this day passed and the Karwoche came, the Week of Care.

Silent Monday . . .

Crooked Wednesday . . .

Ah, sad Toni, why dost thou weep so all day long, and say no word to any man?

And White Thursday now, as some call it, or Green Thursday, meaning Groan Thursday, the day of the groaning of the Prophet Jeremiah; or Almond Day, because good housewives bake almond-cake. Wilt thou not nibble a slice, Toni? Come! Thou hast always had a sweet tooth! No? As thou desirest, *Fackengrint*, pig's head! Make not such big round eyes at me! I offered thee almond-cake. Thou canst only puff and groan and shake thy head.

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And this is Friday, Care Friday. This is Silent Friday. Upon this day the bells are not rung.

What dost thou, Toni, creeping so into the Hugoswald? Why is thy face grey as stones?

What powers will help thee, Hugo? What do they at this moment, Hugo? Is this the moment they sought to compass, Hugo? This is Silent Friday. Upon this day the bells are not rung. Wilt thou ever again hear bells ringing, Hugo?

6

Even Hans the raven, that for so many years now has kept watch and ward over his master, even he is deluded. In this wood he, no less than Hugo, goes freely, for no bird comes to dispute it with him. Here comes Tall Toni crawling on his belly between the trunks. Aloft on his branch Hansl has hardly a glance to spare for him. It is only Toni, the poor Trottel. Birds and beasts, not less than men, pity poor Toni. Here is some new nonsense afoot. Why needs a raven, wisest of all ravens, rack his wits for what he may mean, crawling so on his thin belly between the tree-trunks? Always some nonsense afoot when the master and Toni come together, a plucking of flowers to make necklaces and crowns, a skimming of stones over water.

Toni had not come before into this place. Only the maiden had come before and the master put his arms about her, and they whispered mouth to mouth, forgetting Hansl. But she brought Hansl offerings, fine red sausage and apples baked in sugar. She was a kind lady. She, too, would come soon. Then they would all talk man-talk together. He would fly towards her. She must be coming soon. He would take her offering out of her small hand.

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He lurched away towards the narrow path by which yesterday she had come and all the days before.

But Toni had marked the master where he walked slowly among the trees.

The maiden would be coming soon, thought Hugo. There were no bells to-day. What hour was it? She would be here soon. And her mouth upon his mouth and her smooth white fingers about his throat playing like the doves that walked in and out all day into the dove-cot under the gables of his father's house.

Her smooth white fingers about his throat. A twig snapped. Was she coming? She came so quietly.

But these are not . . . these are not Nanni's fingers about my throat.

Hold! Hold! Who art thou? What trick is this, oh, what fingers are these like steel bands about my throat? Hansl! Hansl! Where art thou? Thou hast never been from my side before! Hansl! Peck out his eyes! Tear the flesh from his bones with thy beak and thy strong claws! It is dark! The forest is a red darkness! The blood bursts in my eyeballs!

Thou, Toni, *thou*?

My master, my pitiful poor master! Pity thy servant, Toni, that loves thee most of all! So was it before, lord! So was it when thou wert upon the cross and the ninth hour came. And thou didst cry with a loud voice, saying, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

But the travail shall be swifter, oh, master! oh, beloved! Even now the travail ceases. Pity Judas thy poor servant. And when thou risest from the sepulchre upon the morning of the third day, love me still, that love thee most of all. The poor tongue! And thy great eyes!

Thy head is like a flower with its stalk broken, leaning

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so upon thy bosom. Let me kiss thee once, master. Oi! Oi! Oi! For I am Judas and have slain thee! And shouldst thou not rise upon the third day, what will befall Judas?

Oh, but thou shalt certainly rise upon the third day. Lean so upon me. Art thou surely dead? And thou shalt place me at thy right hand and thou shalt say . . .

What? Who art thou? What? I cannot see! Thou art the daughter of old Tratzl?

Oh, Nanni, Nanni, Nanni, Nanni! Even as the Holy Ghost bade me, the cloven tongues, like as of fire. With these hands! Do not stare at me so! Thy eyes are larger and whiter than plates. These hands!

Oh, the bird, the bird! Take him from me! He would peck out my eyes! I would behold with them the stone that shall be rolled back from the door, and how he shall come forth with a countenance like lightning, and a raiment white as snow.

Take him! I would keep my eyes!

Do not shriek so, Nanni! Do not shriek! Or I must shriek too!

Bid them come! Bid them take him to the sepulchre!

Wilt thou not go? Must I then go? Listen! Listen, all! Hi! Hi! Hi there!

There is no answer.

The bird is as one dead! Be of good cheer, Hansl! It is for three days only!

Nanni, Nanni, thy brow is cold as snow. Thou art not dead too? I have not slain thee also?

Hi! Hi! Is that someone walking under the wood there? The Herr Hugo is dead! Poor Toni slew him! This way! This way!

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SILENT Friday it is, and the bells may not ring till the Gloria in the Mass to-morrow. No, no, the bells must ring this day! Wildly rang the bells in all the small steeples that surmounted the houses of Hugo's men.

Hugo is dead, the Herr Hugo is dead! Toni the Trottel slew him, as Judas slew Jesus Christ! Hasten! Hasten! Even to the wood where the Herr Hugo lies dead! Out of house and inn, out of meadow, out of shed, hasten all!

And even as they hurried towards the Hugoswald, one and all that had loved him, knowing not whether this was a saint merely or a younger brother of Jesus or Jesus come again after the warring of nations; even as they whispered to one another fearfully that this was the day of the crucifying upon Calvary, and was this not Jesus Christ that lay dead in the Hugoswald — even as they hurried towards the body of the Miracle Boy, the news came that all of them he had raised from the dead were dead again.

And old Tratzl that had sat in a great chair over against the table was a heap of dust in his great chair; and Jacob Kranz not less; and the small maiden Mitsel Pech suffered no more, but was a heap of corruption in her bed; and not less Hiasl the zany and the boy Gastl Tambosi, all whom he had raised from the dead were dead again.

So they stopped upon their journey and whispered amongst themselves and uttered prayers. And they went forward upon their way again, Fanni, the sister of Hugo

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Harpf, beating her head upon the trunks of the trees as she passed them, and the burly Anton Wild whimpering like any small child, and Heinz Abenthum, who was so silent a man, talking shrilly like a jay, discussing even so soon the sepulchre into which the body should be placed, that it might rise again upon three of the clock on Easter morning.

So they came upon the body and carried it down with them, and placed it in a hollow of the rocks that stand up at the foot of that smooth hill where the fourteen Stations of the Cross ascend in zigzag towards the Chapel of the Calvary. And upon a terrace thrust against the side of this smooth hill was the cemetery in which the dead of Midrans lay, who might all so soon rise from their corruption again, at the time of the rising of Hugo Harpf, upon the third morning. And Hugo's men tore down the fencing which at this point was the boundary of God's acre, so that there might be no boundary between God's acre and the sepulchre in which they placed Hugo. And the priest's men dared not say no to this, which they deemed sacrilege and infamy, but gathered glowering about Father Josef against the portals of his house, wondering what would befall, and knowing only one thing surely; that bones must be broken and blood flow in streams, for here was abomination the like of which men had never known before. There must be a wiping out with red rivers, of the insult to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the man Prandl who kept the inn brought forth, like Joseph, a clean linen cloth to wrap about the body of Hugo Harpf, which was placed upright in the sepulchre, so that all his men might see him, above the stone which was rolled to against the lower part of the hollow. And the raven was upon his shoulder, dead as the master, he

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seemed; yet no man dared move him; his beak was a sword and his claws lances. At no time had the two been apart from each other, and for all time they must not be parted.

And Nanni who had loved him and Fanni who was his sister, knelt down before the stone, on both sides of the sepulchre, and placed their hands together and prayed and did not move. And the women went and brought all their candles out of store and set them down in candlesticks and in all manner of plates and lids, for they were not rich in candlesticks. So they set the candles in half-circles about the sepulchre and all night long the men and women and children that had loved Hugo were upon their knees praying. There was no wind during the darkness, and the flames of the candles were not less steady than those huge men and lean women motionless on their knees. But in the moment before dawn a small wind arose and set the flames flickering. One after one the candles were extinguished in the freshening wind, and the men and women and their children rose from their knees, all except Nanni the sweetheart, and the sister, Fanni. And they looked haggardly into each other's eyes and looked away again, towards the two women that still prayed and the dead lad in the sepulchre whose yellow hair glinted faintly in the half-light, whose head lolled sideways over the swollen throat. And they saw little more in the sepulchre than the yellow hair of the master and the eyes of his companion, Hans the raven, which glowed sombrely, like red coals.

How should a man, and that man a Midranser, not drink, if the cold is in his bones?

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"Go!" cried this man and the next man to his wife or daughter. "Go! Bring us wine! Bring us Schnapps! The long hours of the vigil are still before us, all this day, and the dark hours of the night!"

"For each man here," cried Frau Prandl, "two litres, and for each youth a litre! Thereafter it shall be put to his account, though he need not pay to-day!"

"Right friendly, Frau Prandl! And women, bring what Wurst you have in the house and bread and bacon! We must eat! Herr Hugo would not have us not eat!"

The assembly rose from their knees. Their stiff joints cracked loudly in the clear air. It was hard to straighten oneself after being bent so long. The women and girls hobbled away painfully.

"But let there be always," cried Frau Prandl, who had not risen, "not less than ten women and ten men upon their knees!"

"Even so!" echoed Anton Wild the carter. The dew on his beard sparkled frostily.

"And we women that remain," went on Frau Prandl, "will go when the others return. We must be wearing this day the costliest aprons and the fine hats with gold tassels and the great streamers. We must be well attired for the awakening."

"And we men not less," said the famous stallion, Ludl Schnegg, than whom no man in the Floriansthal could blow a trombone more lustily. "And with music also!"

"Truly!" said his friend, Rudolf Streli. "We must honour Herr Hugo with music, not less than with prayer. It will lighten his heart during his long hours of wandering in the cold underworld!"

"Indeed! Indeed! There must be music all day long! Nothing could hearten Herr Hugo more, and if there is

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danger of his losing his way down there, for the paths cannot be easy, then the sound will guide him!"

"And let it not be forgotten," said Heinz Abenthum, "that there must be fires lit to-night, as the custom is. So shall he see the flames flickering and hear the trumpets and the trombones ——"

"And the youngest shall go and ring the bell in the steeples upon our roof-trees, or the old men and women, if they have force enough!"

"Even so! Go now then, Ludl, and thou, too, Rudolf, and all of you that play instruments, and put on your fine scarlet coats and the great hats with the cock's-feathers! He must be greeted worthily upon the awakening!"

So that the bandsmen went for their grand clothes and the women for their brocades and the stiff hats with the long black streamers floating and the gold tassels that rested upon the brims. And when these returned, those that had waited likewise went home for their festival finery, and now under an awning they heaped up the wine in great glass flagons and the Schnapps in earthenware jars.

And how shall a Midranser not drink? And shall he not drink lustily? So they drank, so they prayed, passing the flagons and jars from mouth to mouth, and tilting their heads back without rising from their knees.

Vivid in the spring-time air against the background of green hill where the Stations of the Cross climbed in zig-zag to the Chapel — vivid shone the scarlet coats of the musicians and gallantry waved the cock's-feathers on their high black conical hats. And never had they blown so powerfully into the bass tubes nor so stoutly beaten the drums nor clanged the cymbals more featly, than upon this day.

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For it was not yet noon and Herr Hugo must yet wander many hours uncomforted until he, having raised others from the dead, should raise himself. The dead he had raised were fallen into death with him. How not? From whom else had they breath? But when he raised himself . . .

The moment was drawing nearer when he would raise himself, but it was not yet near. Louder there, bassoon, trombone, drum! He is far off still, but let him catch the comforting echo somewhere far among the dark caverns. Louder! Fill your guts, man, first! Ho, send down that jar of Schnapps. What? Empty! Moidel! Take this over to the White Lamb and have it filled! And this other, too, is empty! Spill none on the way hither! Go now!

Pah! How shall he ever hear such whining? Louder, there! Louder! Burst the drum! But, ho! Listen! Ho! What fools we are! Let us go at once for our rifles! And bring all the metal cases we have and fuses and gunpowder! Let the sky crack! Let us take the jars with us, and the flagons! Drain them first! A slung rifle will not prevent us from bringing a drop of wine back too.

"But there must not be at any moment," said Frau Prandl, "less than ten men and ten women on their knees before the sepulchre!"

There were always more than these. And of these all day long were the dead youth's sister, lean and bony and full of sudden wild crying, and his small sweetheart, Nanni, who uttered not a sound.

In all the drinking and shouting and yodelling, in all the rounds of ammunition that were fired off and the charges of gunpowder that were exploded, there was no

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jubilant. If the peasants were attired in their grandest array, it was not because this day was festival, but because it was their manner in all times of solemnity so to drink and so attire themselves. To-morrow was the day of jubilation, when the Herr Hugo came forth from the cheerless tracts whence he had earlier summoned Jacob Kranz, Gastl Tambosi, Mitsel Pech, and whither they had gone to join him in that same moment that Judas Toni had thrust him there. They had not known what might be done with Toni when they beheld him raving round the corpse of Hugo and wringing his hands and tearing his hair. It had been their first impulse to rend him limb from limb, but the elder men restrained them. And the impulse waned when they heard the manner of his babblings, how he was Judas, who earlier had most loved Jesus Christ, and by the election of the Holy Ghost had once more betrayed him. A wild doubt pierced them as the meaning of the zany's words, now shrill and piercing, now dull and toneless, entered their hearts. Always and at any time, their belief was, a man who sought might find meanings more than earthly in the nonsense of a zany. But to-day he seemed to have spoken with a more desperate and fearful logic than ever priest or any learned man had ventured upon. How shall any Christ raise himself from the dead unless someone first submit to be his murderer? And how shall the murderer be so execrated but for whom none might have been saved? So they loosened their hold from his clothes and his hair and listened despite themselves, and perceived the ghostly truth of it all and how this was Silent Friday, the day of the ringing of no bells, but on the Sabbath, at three of the morning, the lad would raise himself with raiment white as snow and a countenance like lightning; and those others that denied him, the obdurate



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priest and the Pharisees that surrounded him, should shake for fear of him and become as dead men.

So they brought Hugo down to the sepulchre which had seemed appointed from the beginning of time to hold that burden, where the smooth grass slope splintered suddenly into rock and cavern; and they placed him there leaning at ease against the rearward wall, and the maidenhair-fern that hung from the rocky ceiling was a delicate green canopy. But the women washed him first, and did it featly, though Julia, who did this task usually, was away at the priest's side shaking her fists and biting her knuckles. And they rubbed oils into his poor swollen throat and forced the tongue into the mouth again, though this was not easy, for the jaw had stiffened. And Fanni brought out from the chest in the living-room the finest linen in Franz Harpf's house, and Hugo's scarlet coat with the green lapels, and the new green-and-white leg casings she had lately knitted for him; and while she and Ludl saw to it that the raven did no harm, the women dressed him in the sepulchre, so that Hugo too, like the rest, should be finely attired for the jubilee of his awakening. And the man Prandl who kept the inn, brought forth, like Joseph, a clean linen cloth to wrap him in; but nothing was upon his head, and the yellow hair shone faintly and the bird's eyes sombrely. And Ludl Schnegg, who was one of the stoutest men there, rolled a great stone against the sepulchre so that at the grand moment it might be thrust aside like grass.

So cringing and crying Toni followed the crowd that took him to the sepulchre, and though he deemed himself not less than any man there, for he was Judas, and the Holy Ghost had chosen him out of all others, he dared not approach too close, but remained on the outskirts of

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the crowd, and thought that these were not hours and not days, but ages piled upon ages, that separated the death of his master, Hugo, from his glorious stepping forth out of the tomb.

So the noon passed and the afternoon lengthened and more wine and Schnapps were drunk than during whole weeks. The shots rang out, the heavy charges boomed, the brass instruments blared, the drum thudded, the wood-wind moaned — moaned like a young god lost out of the land of his worshippers and crying for his altars. To the priest and his men, passing all day between the priest's house and St. Florian's altar, the sound was abominable like the noises of obscene rites in a steaming jungle. Lorenz Brachmond's hand shook as he filled his glass before the paper-littered table of the council office. Adolf Amrain was pale as chalk. His hair that was a pale red yesterday was grey and chalky as his face to-day.

And as for Conrad von Felsenburg — there were one or two men among the assembly by the sepulchre to whom it seemed that the figure of none other than he coalesced from time to time behind the lurid vapourings of the stricken zany, a figure crowned blasphemously, unspeakably, with some jugglery of cloven fiery tongues. And these left behind the praying and the drinking and presented themselves at the great gate of the Felsenburg. But an urgent message had arrived for the Herr Baron during the evening of the previous day, and he had saddled his horse with all speed and departed. This was by no means the first time that the Herr Baron had been summoned away so unexpectedly. He might be absent no more than some weeks, perhaps some months, a year.

Conrad von Felsenburg has not returned since that day

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to the grim hulk of rock he was born in, that shuts off the village of Midrans from the narrow valley of St. Florian.

It was in the late afternoon it occurred to some roaring young peasant in the company of watchers how this day had always been known amongst them. It was no other day than Judas Saturday, when it was the custom to burn the holy oil of the past year in a consecrated fire. Already the heaps of branches and faggots were being gathered for the bonfires that were to blaze all night and all through the dark early morning, so that Herr Hugo should not lose his way. Now the burning of the holy oil is called by these peasants the Judas-burning. And this roarer's red eye falling suddenly on Tall Toni shivering like a soaked dog on the outskirts of the crowd, he shouted "Ho! Ho! Herr Judas! Let the others burn oil to-day. We shall burn Judas!"

Immediately a dozen husky throats echoed the cry "Burn Judas! Burn Judas!" They hurled themselves upon the wretch, dragged him over squealing to a heap of wood, and fumbled about for cord and matches. "Burn Judas! Burn Judas!" The woods re-echoed the cry.

"Leave him!" thundered the older men. "Are you fools? Will you have the gendarmes loosened upon us? What! And will the master come again to a pack of murderers?"

"He strangled Herr Hugo! Blood for blood! Burn Judas! Burn Judas!"

"Cowards! Have you no other quarry than a poor mad Trottel? Leave him! *Infame Gesindel!* Have you no shame? They are watching the whole time, our enemies! The gendarmes will be upon us!"

A fire was crackling among the twigs. The women

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kneeling before the sepulchre shrieked piteously, some applauded shrilly. There would have been bloodshed and broken bones in not many minutes, and between other factions than Amrain or Brachmond had envisioned, when a wild strange creature burst upon them from round the shoulder of the Kalvarienberg.

She seemed a creature scarcely human with her streaming hair, her tattered flying skirts, her bleeding feet. The oaths and curses died in the throats of young roarers and grim greybeards alike. Their jaws dropped. The assembly shivered as if a door were opened upon them out of the cold underworld where Herr Hugo was wandering now, and which had yielded up in his place this unreal girl of wind and ice. Nothing seemed human about her but the blood on her lips and her feet; not her staring eyes, not the hands she held out before her as if those eyes had no vision.

Or if she was a creature of this earth, then she was less human than animal. Her feet were broad like an animal's pad, the first sounds she uttered were like an animal's, or at most a deaf-mute's. And then gradually, as if speech were foreign and difficult to her, she managed to enunciate a few almost intelligible words. Those that fared furthest afield into the stony wilderness into which the glacier thrusts its snout, remembered who she was.

This was the daughter of Franz Holzhammer, who cracked the cold stiff soil for a few roots and a few stalks of grain away at the end of the world. What did this benighted maiden among green meadows, for her eyes were cold as the glacier's walls and her breath was frost?

"He is dead!" she cried. "He slew himself! With a sharp stone he cut his throat!"

"Hush, *Deirndl*, hush! Who then?" Frau Prandl was

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about her, enveloping her in human comfort. But the girl was like a slim wind that human hands cannot hold. She was free again, her arms outstretched, her head thrust forward, her eyes roving from face to face as if she sought someone.

"My father is dead! His blood drips on the stones! With his last breath he said, 'For testimony of Hugo Harpf I did it, who is the Master! Others he raised, bid him raise me also! Go, maiden!'"

"Alas, alas, woe upon thee, maiden!"

"Where is Hugo Harpf, that he may raise him?"

"Dead like Jesus Christ, whom Judas slew!"

"Where is he, where is the Master that must raise him?"

"There he stands!"

"How then? Why do the women kneel?"

"Dead, I say!"

"How can that be? He cannot be dead! He must come with me at once to my father, whose blood drips on the stones!"

"Later, my child, later! We, too, all that are gathered here, await his arising! Not many more hours to pass now! He shall rise, as Jesus rose, upon three of the morning. Knowst thou not what eve this is? The morrow is Easter! The day of awakening! His countenance shall be like lightning and his raiment ——"

"But he is dead! He is dead, you say!" She stared fixedly into the twilight of the sepulchre.

"Until the morning!"

"He is dead! He is dead!" the girl wailed, falling upon the grass between the two women who kept the portals of the sepulchre. "He is dead and will not rise! And my father bleeds on the cold stones!"

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She fell inertly on to her forehead, like a lump of hard clay.

"Poor maiden, poor maiden!" mourned Frau Prandl, chafing her brows. But the girl's words had chilled all those that were gathered there more than any bleak wind. Toni the zany was forgotten. Heinz Abenthum had trodden out the flames earlier. All was a question of drink and more drink now, to keep the torment out of their bones. And wilder shooting. And more brazen music. And ho, there! Get these jars filled, and these flagons!

3

So night came. And the music blared, and the rifles barked and the bonfires soared and swayed in the wind. And to the priest kneeling at the altar, who saw the sky wink and flicker through the windows of the church, it seemed that naked hell was loose and the fires of damnation kindled upon earth. Louder there, trombone! Ram another charge home! Heap the logs higher! Let him not be lost in the obscure labyrinth! Louder so that he may hear, more fire that he may see!

It is two of the clock upon Easter Sunday morning.

And now with one accord all the bells in the small belfries above the houses of Hugo's men swing into clamour. Louder, bells! louder, guns! More twigs, branches! Hack whole trees down!

And the bells in Hugo's belfries clamour for Hugo Harpf. And the bells in the priest's belfries clamour for Jesus Christ. And the door of God's house is open; but the sepulchre still is sealed with the great stone rolled against it.

Half an hour to go now before the arising of Hugo

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Harpf. Whole trees, I say! Let the flames write messages along the whole narrow sky confined by the peaks of the Floriansthal! Let the whole sky be Hugo's parchment!

Ten minutes now.

Five minutes before the third hour. Upon that moment the small lads and girls that have been sent home to ring Hugo's bells must all be upon their knees. The rest are gathered about the half-circles of candles before the sepulchre. Their hands are folded before them, their chins upon their bosoms, but their eyes are upon the dead lad in the sepulchre, upon the yellow hair that shines faintly in the light from the candles, and the eyes of the dark bird, that glow sombrely.

Hugo's bells are silent. The priest's bells clamour for Jesus Christ.

One minute more and the third hour shall have struck.

One minute more or one æon more, the great boulder shall not be rolled aside like thistle-down from the opening of the sepulchre, nor Hugo Harpf step forth with a countenance like lightning and a raiment white as snow.

Five minutes beyond the third hour. The head of Hugo Harpf lolls slackly upon his shoulder. And the eyes of Father Josef at the altar are brighter than all the bonfires, and Jesus Christ is upon the mountain-tops and in the valleys. And all the doors of God's house are open that he might enter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I

THE two gendarmes whom the Burgermeister stationed on the Sunday evening at the further end of the meadow were not noticed by the younger men, who might not have noticed a platoon of soldiers. Wild and Abenthum and the elder men did not feel it would be wise to remonstrate. They did not see how the move offered any grounds for remonstrance. They realized that if the daughter of Franz Holzhammer had not made her startling appearance, it would have fared ill with Toni, despite all the efforts of the few who had kept their heads. They knew also that it would have been impossible for the Burgermeister, in that event, to hold his hand any longer. He would have had no alternative but to yield at length to the pressure which Father Josef and his men had been subjecting him to ever since Sunday morning. Their own spies and runners had kept them informed of affairs in the parish office. Father Josef was striding up and down, bellowing and beating his fist on the table. His younger men had delivered themselves up to an orgy, in the conviction that when the fumes dispersed half a day later, they would see the discomfited enemy slinking home like curs. Peppi Ganner, having swallowed half a dozen glasses of Schnapps in swift succession, had marched bold as brass up to Brachmond and informed him that unless he promptly obeyed Father Josef's request that a posse of frontier-police should be summoned from Schlamms, he

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and his mates would burn the parish office down about Brachmond's ears. Lorenz Brachmond measured the young man, then felled him like a log. Peppi Ganner took no further interest in the day's proceedings. Then Brachmond turned to the priest. There had been no crime committed, he said, no technical disturbance of the peace. He had no jurisdiction in the matter. He must await developments.

But every abomination against Jesus Christ had been perpetrated, raged the priest. He rehearsed the separate heresies, galvanizing into life the dead hulks of theology he had stowed twenty and thirty years ago into the cellars of his mind. But that, said Brachmond, was the province of the high-worthy one. He could do nothing in the circumstances, until it could be represented that the corpse was becoming a menace to public health. Neither he, nor his assistant, Herr Amrain, was disposed to prejudge the matter as to whether the dead youth might, or might not, resurrect himself before the body attained such a condition. So the friends of the deceased youth still claimed. He must await developments.

Father Josef was livid. Steffel, the sexton, wept. Old Ganner bit the skin off his knuckles. Felsheim roared and swore. The detachment returned to their headquarters on the terrace before the priest's house.

As for Adolf Amrain, his knees knocked together like fir-cones in a wind.

Anton Wild and Heinz Abenthum were aware that the two gendarmes had been requested to keep carefully out of the way. With the assistance of the women, the young men might be kept in check until at length, in twelve hours, or twenty, the moment came; until the gendarmes, too, threw themselves upon the ground, as any man must,

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upon the rolling away like thistle-down of a great stone and the stepping forth of a dead youth with his glory about him.

For there was not one in all that assembly who believed that because Hugo had not arisen he would not arise. Or perhaps only one belonging to that assembly. The daughter of Franz Holzhammer seemed not a creature of this earth at all. And when the moment of the third hour came and there was no sudden blazing of supernal lights, no choiring of supernal voices, but only a dead lad among the rocks, she waited no more than a minute or two, then rose from her knees like a wisp of mist and ran fifty yards away, and squatted on her haunches, and gibbered like a monkey; and stayed so for some hours, and then disappeared.

But the rest believe to this day, as they believed that morning of Easter Sunday, that in twenty hours or twenty years, Hugo Harpf would raise himself from the dead. And they paint him in fresco upon their house-fronts and carve him in wood over their fountains, so that when he arises he shall be confronted with the testimony of their faith in him, whosoever he may be, a saint merely or a younger son of God. For they believed then, as they now believe, that he was lost somewhere in the labyrinths, calling, listening. He had not heard their trumpets nor their rifle-shots. He had not caught the reflection of their fires. In twelve hours, or twenty (as they deemed then) he would come certainly.

How should he not?

The saturnalia that flared on the meadows before the sepulchre all the next day and night were fiercer than they had been, fiercer than they had been in all the Christian centuries. Not since the days when the swarthy ones, their

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mysterious predecessors, celebrated their rites upon these same meadows, and the revellers in their ecstasy let fall a brooch, a ring, to be turned later by Christian ploughs — not in all these intervening centuries had there been such revelry in Midrans, so frantic, so anxious. Revelry so lewd, say the priest and the priest's men. For, indeed, it may not be told here what things are whispered amongst those men who hold Hugo Harpf to have been, or to have been possessed by, an arch-demon, despite his seeming during his early years to have been a plain peasant like themselves. It is only furtively, when Hugo's men are not by, that they whisper these things, and sign themselves with the Cross. And this is the paradox of Midrans in the Floriansthal: that hardly less furtively do Hugo's men speak of him, though they will paint his image three metres high. And speaking of him, they also sign themselves with the Cross, and mutter a prayer, and wonder when the hard hearts of their kinsmen will be softened. And when this priest is dead or will go elsewhere, will his successor understand? Will their kinsmen in the further territories of the faith, beyond mountains, beyond seas, understand? Or will they not believe until himself is manifest again?

They do not speak much, or ever loudly, concerning Hugo. And what happened during that stretch of hours before the final twenty-four that were permitted them, will never be clearly known: what spells were uttered (as the priest's men whisper) in the fringing woods, what incantations exhumed from ancient and forbidden practice, what dancings, what sacrifices of bound or unbound beasts.

It may be that all this is hideous fabrication. How shall it be other, if a man dares to hint how a maiden so sweet, so stricken, as Nanni Tratzl, should bid her beloved

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companion, Docksel the goat, be brought from the shed and have him garlanded with flowers, and permit him to be slaughtered by the knives of blindfolded men? How can such a calumny rise except from the hatred felt against her by Hugo's enemies in that she was Hugo's high-priestess? The truth shall never be clearly known. But the drums thudded. The brass blared. The wood-wind howled. The fires roared. The very earth was soaked with liquor. So the cold dawn became cold evening and cold dawn again.

But Hugo Harpf did not come from the sepulchre.

2

So at dawn Lorenz Brachmond appeared in person and advanced between the two gendarmes and demanded to speak with Anton Wild. The old man came forward and listened attentively. Should Hugo Harpf not raise himself from the dead within twenty-four hours from this moment precisely, the authorities would be forced to take matters into their own hands. The body of Hugo Harpf would be taken in charge by the civil power and buried according to law and custom. Despite efforts made by the Burgermeister and his officers the priests neither at Midrans nor at Wilding nor at Schlamms were willing to recite the Burial Service over Hugo Harpf. It was expected that the difficulty would be overcome. Herr Brachmond hoped it was understood clearly. The deceased must raise himself from the dead within twenty-four hours from this moment. If he did not, the course of decency and public health could no longer be interfered with.

Lorenz Brachmond retired between the two gendarmes. They were not the same gendarmes as yesterday. These

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were strangers. Evidently reinforcements had been introduced into the Gendarmerie. Anton Wild turned to the assembly and announced the ultimatum presented to him by the Burgermeister.

Dead carrion! proclaimed the priest. A stink in the nostrils of our Lord! The demons have come forth from the woods and out of the holes of the earth! The men of Midrans are possessed of demons! But Allelujah! Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost! The prime demon has failed them! Dead carrion! A stink in the nostrils of our Lord.

But it was not the execration of the priest that had brought the matter to a crisis.

"I smell blood," shrilled Julia. "There is blood on the wings of the wind that blows down the valley." But the smell of blood had neither held nor forced the hand of Lorenz Brachmond.

A cow in calf had fallen dead by the stream. Four other beasts were dying. Of these five, two belonged to Hugo's men, three to the priest's men. The small lads and girls, and the infirm old people, had had the beasts in charge and it had been hard enough work. But oldest and youngest had risen manfully to the occasion. The beasts had eaten nothing, drunk nothing, that could account for the calamity. Then it became known that they had all drunk from a trough fed by a certain small rivulet that wandered thinly towards the Sturmbach from the foot of the Kalvarienberg. There was little enough water in it, but earlier in its course it had sufficed to supply moisture for the maidenhair-fern that hung over the head of Hugo Harpf, in the sepulchre where he stood upright, unmoving, the dark bird on his shoulder. A few drops sank into the

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grass at his feet. Sooner or later these drops joined the parent rivulet again. It filled the trough where the stricken beasts had drunk. The body of Hugo Harpf was poisoning the cattle.

It was to a grim and haggard congregation that Anton Wild delivered his brief message. If the body of Hugo Harpf that was poisoning the cattle did not arise from its death within twenty-four hours from this moment — he pointed to the gilded fingers of the clock set into St. Florian's steeple — the Gemeinde, assisted by the frontier-police then on their way from Schlamms, and by the priest and his men, would seize the body of the Miracle Boy and carry it away to do with it as they deemed fit.

There was no howl of execration. There was no shaking of fists and stamping of feet. They turned their tired eyes towards the slack dead body and lowered their heads for some minutes and folded their hands. The fever had exhausted itself. The air was smoky with the sinking fires. The vigil had conquered even such flesh as theirs. Their spirits were not conquered. Some lay about against the stones or the tree-trunks, with a blanket round their shoulders, having permitted themselves at length an hour or two's sleep. They were awakened. A low consultation followed. A few went off to see that their beasts were kept from drinking any harmful water, not least anxiously Franz Harpf, the brother of the dead youth. He had given the strictest injunctions to his father to look after the beasts, and to his two youngest brothers to look after their father. He found old Harpf emerging from a stupor of drink and kicked him back into a stupor again. Those about the sepulchre who had a stomach for food, ate it, those who had not, drained their glasses and held them

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out shakily to their women for more. Ludl Harpf, it is said, neither ate nor drank during these days. There was more traffic between their homes and the meadow under the cemetery than there had been since the first morning after Hugo had been placed in the sepulchre. Nor was there any attempt to disguise the object of all this going to and fro. There were frontier-police coming in from Schlamms. The priest's men were arming themselves. The enemy should not find Hugo's men unprepared. There was no woman or girl even who did not insist on having some weapon to hand, if it were only a pitchfork or hay-rake. Yet when she found it in her hand she looked at it curiously, as if she wondered who had put it there. The whole company moved and talked like somnambulists. They seemed to remember only dimly what it was they were expecting, what thing might awaken them out of this sleep of walking or lying or sitting down. The men rammed the cartridges into their belts as if they were performing some mechanical function with symbolic objects whose meaning escaped them. As night came on, the women once more, and for the last time, set the half-circles of candlesticks and lids and plates about the sepulchre. At the portals of the sepulchre the sweetheart and the sister of the strangled lad seemed petrified upon their knees. Whatsoever might happen at the end of these permitted hours, nothing, it seemed, might unstiffen their limbs again. But when the candlesticks were set into their places, the women looked about absently for something that seemed to pertain to them, they could hardly remember what. Candles it was that must be set into the candlesticks and lit before the sepulchre of Herr Hugo. They remembered. Candles. But they had exhausted most of their store of candles, and the few candle-ends that remained

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made no great show that night. Yet if the yellow hair of Hugo glinted still more faintly in the little light, the eyes of the raven seemed more lurid than before. He seemed a creature carved out of darkness, and his eyes to burn with lights enkindled neither upon the comfortable earth nor in the goodly heavens. He had not once flapped a wing nor uttered a sound, being the incarnate principle of Death, guarding his own in the sepulchre. He seemed dead as the master upon whose shoulder he was perched. But he was rigid as rock. The boy was a limp mass, slack, who would long since have toppled or slid over to the ground but for the sloping wall that held him.

And the fires that burned that night to light the way for Hugo were hardly brighter than the candle-flames. The muscles that had hacked down whole trees with the force of titans ached now, and were useless. There was no breath behind the ribs of the musicians. They could produce no other sound than a thin wheezing and complaining. There were no more charges rammed home in shell-cases. The powder was all spent. No rifle-shots ricocheted among the mountains. There would be other use for shot.

So at length the end of the permitted time was upon them, and Anton Wild looked at the gilded fingers of St. Florian's clock and made out in the dimness that there was less than half an hour to go. And some minutes later he saw a crowd that appeared from between the last houses of the village and came forward slowly across the murky dawn. At the head of the crowd was a body of a dozen or more frontier-police, with a sergeant at their head. Lorenz Brachmond was with them and one or two of his councillors. Adolf Amrain was not to be seen. A short space separated them from the priest's party, as many women as men. At the head of these, as tall as any

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of them, marched the priest, with a great cross held at his side by a stout youth. The frontier-policemen marched over to the post where the two gendarmes were posted and took up a formation. The priest's men and women remained at a distance of fifty yards or more.

Perhaps it was not to be expected that so few candles, and fires that flickered so wanly, should pierce the darkness, or that Hugo Harpf should overhear voices so husky. Had not all the brass and gunpowder failed to reach him, and the roaring bonfires failed to tempt him to step forth and warm his cold hands?

The half-hour had gone by. The twenty-four hours had gone by. Hugo Harpf who had raised others from the dead had not raised himself. A wind freshened among the tree-tops and shook the thin mist that lay along the meadows of the Sturmbach. As the mist parted, it had the seeming of two colossal armies set in motion and skirmishing silently.

There was a pause. No man said a word in the assembly against the sepulchre nor amongst the others gathered into a small and a larger body on the further side of the meadow.

The silence was shattered by a sound which came from neither company. It seemed a sound which a beast might make more easily than a human — a yelp, almost. And the figure of Tall Toni, the zany, was seen to make for the further woods. The gait also was a beast's rather than a man's. He seemed to lurch and lope on all fours. No man in Midrans or the Floriansthal ever saw Toni again.

At the moment in which he disappeared into the wood a shot rang out. The bullet did not touch him, for no sign of blood was found later. Nor was it ever ascertained from which party the shot came. Neither loved him. In

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the next moment two or three shots were fired in succession. There was no doubt whence these came. Peppi Ganner lay writhing at his father's feet, biting the grass. Rudolf Streli was vomiting blood under the knees of his friend Ludl Schnegg. It seems certain that in another half-minute such a hideous affair would have been raging upon those meadows under the Kalvarienberg, that there might have been few survivors to tell the strange tale of Hugo Harpf other than the old people who had been left at home upon their knees, and the small children. There would have been more dead men in Midrans than hands able to bury them, and such a feud established that the crops must have rotted down to their roots, and the houses have tumbled in upon their foundations.

It might be said that what now happened was the last miracle of Hugo Harpf. The women who had armed themselves with any ugly weapon they could lay hands on, who had been full of a rancour not less atrocious than the men's, were in one moment smitten with wisdom. They became clairvoyant. They saw Hugo Harpf standing, still dead, in the centre of the meadow, and the heaps of their own dead, their sons, their lovers, ranged about him neatly. And they heard him speak, though he was still dead. His voice was rather petulant, as it had always been of late. And they caught not the words, but the purport, of it. It seemed to him witless, he complained, there should be so much pother, with so much to do elsewhere, for the women in their kitchens and the men in their fields. Were they all zanies in Midrans? The women not so much as their men, surely? And for himself, must he have no rest, must he always have no rest? How? Why did they not speak?

So that the women uttered a great shout and cast their

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weapons away and hurled themselves in a compact body between Hugo's men and the priest's men in such a manner that every man was forced to lower his firearm. A fierce mêlée ensued, full of sharp screams and hoarse shouting, for the whole horde of Hugo's men, priest's men, Hugo's women, priest's women, straightway flowed together like converging water; and for some minutes it was impossible to say whether this, after all, was a battle between enemies who loathed each other or between wives and husbands in disagreement. The sergeant marched his posse of frontier-policemen forward and cried sternly that his disorder must cease straightway. But he might have been a dog barking. The voice of the priest was louder and sterner. He was tall and stiff as the great cross beside him.

"In the name of God the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!" he commanded . . . But the butt-end of a rifle slipped against his teeth, as the wife of one of his own men sought to tear it from her husband's grasp. No man knew who was his friend or enemy now, excepting that his wife seemed clearly his enemy, in the way she scratched at him and bit him in order to make him drop his gun. There were many wives that day and for days after who paid dearly for their conduct now. But they did not resent the blows they received, not merely because they were used to them, but because they preferred the live fist of a husband in their mouths to the dead hands of a husband folded over his bosom.

They had succeeded. This was no affair of rifles and broken brains but of fists and broken noses. Blood flowed freely, but from torn skins not pierced lungs. Enfeebled as Hugo's men were by the long fervours of their vigil, they managed more magnificently than seemed possible to

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transcend the numbness that had fallen upon them. In all the annals of lusty fighting in Midrans, no men had ever fought more lustily. The sergeant took his men a short distance away. Seeing that the matter was developing along lines so orthodox, his only duty was to keep a look-out, in case it should depart from them. He had extricated the two young men who had been brought down. There was a chance that one of them would live. Even if he did not, it would be satisfactory if he had to report no more than two victims. By trying to part the combatants, he realized clearly there was every chance of adding to their number. Their women were chafing the brows of the two young men, the one who was dead and the other who might live. Two other women, who had not moved from the portals of that hollow in the rocks where the dead man had been placed, seemed to need attention almost as urgently. They had fallen into a swoon from which nothing seemed likely to awaken them. He drew the notice of the elder men who were standing near him to their condition. But at that moment nothing could be done. The battle was swaying towards the two women outside the hollow and the body of the lad inside it, the lad with the ghoulisn bird upon his shoulder.

The elder men were Heinz Abenthum and Anton Wild in deep conversation with the Burgermeister and old Felsheim, whom the sergeant recognized to be a leader of the priest's party. Terms of armistice were already being discussed; but they all knew that the discussion was premature. The bad blood must out first. The fight was raging more fiercely than before, nearer and nearer to the sepulchre. The business had entered upon a new and more formidable stage. At first it had seemed enough to both parties that they had their fists at length in each other's

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faces. Now it was evident that the priest's men were determined at all costs to get to the sepulchre and their enemies were determined at all costs to keep them away from it. Some of the women, too, had thrust themselves into the fighting alongside their men. But for the most part, the sergeant observed, the women held aloof, having achieved their purpose of keeping firearms out of the struggle. He perceived that some of them, sisters or cousins they seemed, were tentatively making efforts to approach each other. The women, at least, understood that the matter, somehow and soon, must be at an end. Midrans must be Midrans again. They were alive. Their husbands and sons were alive. The dead must decide their own destinies. He saw how they dragged the two women who lay unconscious before the sepulchre out of danger. And none too soon. Hugo's men, undermined by the exaltation and gloom of these late days, were at length giving away. The priest, attended by the cross-bearer, not less formidably disintegrated them than all the blows of his supporters. High above the shouts and curses and thud of fists his voice was lifted in execration. The words could not be distinguished, nor the language hardly: but its purport and efficacy were clear enough. How might Hugo's men be expected to withstand him, if Hugo Harpf does not arise, even now, even now, to be their banner and their right hand?

So Hugo's men fell away from the cross and the priest who rose beside it, so urgent, so terrible. And two of the priest's men rolled aside the great stone that Ludl Schnegg had thrust against the opening of the sepulchre, and with a cry of exultation the priest pushed aside those of his men who would have dragged out the corpse and himself entered into that dark hollow to drag forth the carrion

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thence, that had so stunk in the nostrils of the Lord. But even as the cry of exultation swelled on his lips, it became a wild shriek of pain. He staggered backwards over the threshold of the sepulchre, clawing desperately at fierce wings that eluded his fingers. The blood streamed horribly down his face from his left eye-socket. There was no eye in it, or only such an eye as would never have vision again. At length the priest's frenzied fingers had the wings in his grasp. He tore the bird away from his face and held it above his head for one moment, and looked towards it, or thought he did, with his single eye, and saw the beak gape at him across a penumbra of blood and flame. And in that same moment the sergeant, than whom there was no finer marksman in his native valley, took aim and shot the raven's head clean away. But it seemed to many that the headless bird, having wrenched his wings free from the priest's hands, sought even now to recover his place upon the shoulder of his dead master, under the yellow hair that was now so lightless. But the creature dropped heavily on to the grass this side of the sepulchre and while the dark wings were still convulsively fluttering, the priest, despite his anguish, and the men that were nearest him, crushed the small heap of flesh and feathers into the ground, till it seemed a paltrier thing than any tussock of grass or heap of dead leaves.

To the strangers whom Lorenz Brachmond had been compelled to call in, the priest's triumph must have seemed decisive, so far as they troubled themselves to think about it. But the men of Midrans, priest's men and Hugo's men, may have thought even so soon that this was not so. It is possible, indeed, that the defeat and the victory are alike greater than the men of Midrans know; and that the meas-

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ure in which Father Josef failed and Hugo Harpf triumphed, will not be apparent till centuries after the last fresco of the Miracle Boy and his Raven has been obliterated from their walls and their last effigy ceased to be recognizable over the troughs and fountains.

Innsbruck 1926-1927.

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

The type in which this book has been set (on the Linotype) is based on the design of Caslon. It is generally conceded that William Caslon (1692-1766) brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection and while certain modifications have been introduced to meet changing printing conditions, the basic design of the Caslon letters has never been improved. The type selected for this book is a modern adaptation rather than an exact copy of the original Caslon. The principal difference to be noted is a slight shortening of the ascending and descending letters to accommodate a larger face on a given body-size.



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